

Tablets can help elderly cross the 'digital divide'

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Credit: Michigan State University

One way to help the elderly cross what's known as the "digital divide" is the use of tablets, those smaller, lighter, easy-to-use computers that seem to be taking the place of laptops.

New Michigan State University research has found that the use of tablets

does make it easier, breaking down some of the barriers that keep seniors from getting connected.

In addition to being smaller, lighter and more portable, tablets allow people to maneuver online without having to move and click a mouse.

"The dexterity required to control a mouse is really hard for some [older adults](#)," said Shelia Cotten, an MSU professor of media and information who led the research. "A certain level of muscle control is needed. And some older adults have shaking issues, in addition to muscle-control issues in their hands and arms."

Cotten also said that in most cases, tablets are just easier to use, especially for people who don't have a lot of computer experience.

"For the most part they are pretty easy to operate," she said. "You don't have to click on 12 different things to do what you want to do. It helps to ease their tech anxiety."

The researchers also found that when an [elderly person](#)'s family recommended a certain type of tablet and helped them learn how to use it, that contributed to their computer-use confidence as well. They learned how to use tablets by watching others use them and also by playing around on the tablets themselves.

It's a fact that getting online can help the elderly feel more connected to family and friends, as well as providing them with useful information.

"For example, it allows them to be more proactive in their health care," Cotten said. "They have access to health information, [electronic medical records](#) and so on."

Last year, Cotten and colleagues published research that found Internet

use among the [elderly](#) can help ward off depression.

"It's all about [older persons](#) being able to communicate, to stay in contact with their social networks and just not feel lonely," she said."

Cotten said [tablets](#) will be increasingly used by older adults, noting the recent announcement of collaboration between Apple, IBM and Japan Post to disseminate 5 million tailored iPads to older adults in Japan.

This recent research, published in the journal *Educational Gerontology*, was funded by the National Institute on Aging.

More information: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/...
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Provided by Michigan State University

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