

Digital Participation Among People Aged 50+ in Switzerland: Insights to Course Offers and Training Experiences

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Abstract: Digital skills in everyday life are inescapable, particularly if one wants to stay socially engaged in later life. With ageing societies, it must be ensured that all, also older adults, are not behind. The digital divide has been long dealt with, however, in this debate the heterogeneity of adults aged 50+ are largely neglected. This research article is part of a mixed-methods study. It assesses the digital training courses currently provided and the experiences and needs of people aged 50+ who participated in such courses. A program analysis and individual qualitative interviews were used to extract the views and experiences of older adults, retired, or still working, in Switzerland. The wide range of training offers, and the results of our interviews indicate that digital participation is a relevant aspect of everyday life, so be and stay socially engaged and fosters well-being and self-esteem. We relate the concept of digital competences and digital participation to our empirical findings.

1 INTRODUCTION

Today, society is being transformed by digitalization (Tskekeris, 2018). Digitalization changes society and the lives of individuals fundamentally. The Covid-19 pandemic showed us how important digital skills are today, even if it is only to stay in touch and be connected to our loved ones. Especially, the pandemic has excluded older adults from personal contact in society whereas the young benefited from opportunities of modern information and communication technologies using their smartphones or tablets. The current Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the process of digitalization recently (Seifert and Charness, 2022). Despite digital development and improvement, it must be ensured that all citizens can develop skills necessary to participate in daily public and social life and to access services provided, e.g., health or banking services. Since population ageing is on the rise, it must be ensured that older adults are able to apply, maintain and acquire skills with the constant digital progress.

Digital skills and competences are inescapable and essential (European Commission, 2018; Ferrari et al., 2013). Ferrari (2012) provides a comprehensive definition of digital competences as

“...the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes (thus including abilities, strategies, values and awareness) that are required when using ICT and digital media to perform tasks; solve problems; communicate; manage information; collaborate; create and share content; and build knowledge effectively, efficiently, appropriately, critically, creatively, autonomously, flexibly, ethically, reflectively for work, leisure, participation, learning, socialising, consuming, and empowerment” (p. 3-4).

Regardless of today’s progress of digitalization, there are still vulnerable populations who have either limited digital competences or access to various devices. Older adults tend to have fewer digital competences as they opt to not use the internet compared to than younger generations who grew up

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with the digital world. This observation of a digital gap between the generations is called the digital divide (Friemel, 2016), which was highly criticized and discussed in detail of being dichotomous, not including or considering other aspects. One key criticism is that there is a high risk to overlooking the group of people who – in a continuum of digital skills – are not at one end but somewhere in the middle (Hämmerle et al., 2022). In recent years hence, discourses shifted to more inclusive views, i.e., rather than to focus on what is missing or who is missing out in debates of digitalisation, it is increasingly relevant to fill the gaps and ask how to address the divide and seek to broaden the understanding if a digital inclusion and approaches how to alleviate so-called existing divides, gaps and inequalities relating to digitalization (Reisdorf and Rhinesmith, 2020).

By talking of excluded populations within the digitalized world, the social group older adults were major area of interest. However, up to now, far too little attention has been paid to people aged between 50 and 70 with only moderate digital skills have received far less attention than the population aged 65+ who are retired and in their third part of life. Part of this younger old group is often referred to as Baby Boomer generation, Baby boomers or just boomers (Oertel 2014). Now, by considering typical cohort effects and incorporating the concept of digital divide, we assume that the proportion of the group with moderate digital skills is especially high among people 50+, as most of these people have gained their digital skills more at work than in schools or at home (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Reiner et al., 2020).

Our research project focuses therefore particularly on persons in their second half of life who were trained in digital skills and competencies on the job (Prensky, 2001) and have not grown up in the world of digitalisation. One goal of this study is to depict the digital skills and training needs of the overlooked social group of people aged 50+ who either are still in professional life, close to retirement or retired. The comparison of different cohorts shows that boomers have different needs than older cohorts (aged ≥ 65). We took this cut-off and research gap for our research project about digital skills of adults aged 50+ living in Switzerland (see Hämmerle et al. 2022). We focus on their needs in the field of digital skills and their experiences in digital trainings. The aim of the research project is to a) outline an assessment of the status quo of digital trainings, b) investigate the needs and wishes of course participants and hereafter, c) to provide best practice recommendations for action. Further, this study seeks to raising awareness to the unfortunate general assumption and assignation of

people of a certain age (or generation) to a completely homogenous category of “older adults” or even “older people” (see also Schumacher & Misoch 2017).

Our assumptions on digital participation of people aged 50+ in Switzerland are based on previous studies (cf. Stallmann 2012; Höpflinger 2015; Pauli & Misoch, 2018; Schumacher Dimech & Misoch, 2017). We particularly focus on the issue of enabling digital participation among people aged 50+. The starting point of this project are two important developments: (1) The Baby Boomer generation has higher digital skills than older generations (Hämmerle et al., 2022: 278) and (2) Progressive digitalization (which was given another boost by the Covid-19 pandemic) leads to different prerequisites and needs for digital training and education. In general, it can be observed that the group with hardly any digital knowledge is increasingly shrinking. This makes it as well more difficult to reach out to this specific group. The transformation from having no clue and no digital skills at all is shifting to more basic digital knowledge mostly acquired on the job. Hence, this development changes the needs for digital training which need to be adjusted and enhanced for the group with basic or little digital skills.

The research paper at hand outlines preliminary results and focuses in two data sets from the overall study: assessment of the current course offers available in Switzerland and interviews with individuals who have experience in digital course trainings. We firstly aim at crystallizing if course providers are adequately addressing their target group and what digital skills and competences are offered therein. While breaking down and illustrating different digital competence areas of people aged 50+, we firstly map out what digital competences currently are offered and what needs, or changes are required for existing offered courses to meet the needs of participants.

Secondly, we are interested in the course experience of participants and asked about their opinions, needs, and wishes for future courses and their motivation linked to course participation. We outline what motivates participants to attend digital skill courses whether retired or still working. In doing so, we then explore under what circumstances courses on digital skills offered can contribute to both, digital and social participation.

The paper closes with a discussion and exploration on how digital participation might support avoiding digital and social exclusion in later life.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPLIED METHODS

Our study *Digital Skills and Training Needs of 50+. A Study Beyond the Digital Divide* takes the methodological approach of a mixed methodology (Cresswell and Vicki, 2007; Kelle 2022) based on:

- a program analysis (N = 193; Käßplinger, 2008; Nolda, 2011; Schrader and Zentner, 2010; Mayring, 2012)
- a large-scale quantitative telephone survey (CATI, N = 400; Howard, 2014),
- 20 qualitative semi-standardized follow-up interviews (N = 20; Misoch, 2019), and
- an online platform containing a self-assessment test to generate long-term data during and beyond the project duration (see Hämmerle et al., 2020).

For the paper at hand, focus lie on the qualitative part of the study, hence program analysis and the 20 individual interviews.

2.1 Program Analysis of 193 Courses

Program analysis is a widely tested method in adult education (Nolda, 2011) for analysing course offerings in the continuing education sector. The method is a continued development of the qualitative content analysis after Mayring (2012, 2015). With the help of this method an inventory of further training courses for the expansion of digital skills can be made. Inductive and deductive category formation go hand in hand in program analysis (Gieseke and Opelt, 2003; Käßplinger, 2008; Nolda, 2011; Schrader and Zentner, 2010; Mayring, 2012).

We collected all relevant courses were through the website *berufsberatung.ch* (ch.ch). The website contains a course search tool. This official website for vocational training in Switzerland lists training offers from all cantons considering the different language regions. The project team imported the relevant data (course descriptions) then to ATLAS.ti.

The program analysis then finally consists of 193 documents of digital training offers. Low-threshold course are not included in the sample. The 193 course descriptions from 2020 include 118 courses from German-speaking part, 19 from French speaking part and 28 from Italian speaking part of Switzerland.

As the program analysis proceeds the project team carried out a code schema and the search for anchor

examples. The coding scheme is based on the literature of the method (Käßplinger, 2008; Schrader and Zentner, 2010) and on categories and subcategories that have emerged from the development of the self-assessment questionnaire and derived from the Digital Competence Framework. With this analytic scheme we could make visible which areas of competences are addressed in the course programs and which occur rarely and are totally neglected.

The coding scheme was built on the categories “the degree of participation”, “the targets of the course”, “the target group”, “the content of the course”, “required precognition/previous knowledge”, “the event format” “the understanding of digitalization” and “the methods used in the course”. Minimum and maximum contrast courses with different target groups and course content were selected as anchor example.

The coding plan was tested on the following anchor examples “Android smartphone in everyday life-

Beginner course for seniors and senior citizens” (D4_001), “Smartphones in everyday life – beginners” (D_46) “Deepening in the computer in everyday life” and “Digital Marketing Specialist - Certificate of the provider” (D_129).

It turned out that the deductive variables “participation” and “understanding of digitalization” as well as the teaching method could hardly be found empirically in the course descriptions.

2.2 Individual Qualitative Interviews

We conducted in addition to the data of the program analysis 20 qualitative semi-structured individual interviews via telephone survey. The interviews were conducted in cooperation with DemoSCOPE. Ten interviewees were recruited from the quantitative CATI study who expressed an interest in an in-depth qualitative interview, ten were chosen out of a follow-up recruitment. Interviewees were aged between 55 and 80 years, from almost all linguistic parts of Switzerland (German, French, Italian), including in total 11 male and nine female respondents.

For comprehensibility, the interview guide in German was checked in a pre-test (n=2). Interview data was transcribed into text data (German) which thereafter was analysed after Mayring’s content analysis (2012) with help of the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. Here, we put emphasis

¹ D stands for document and shows the number in brackets indicate the frequency of how many times the categories were counted in ATLAS.ti.

intercoder reliability which was achieved through Ruther and Speck from the project team coding the text data independently according to Mayring (2015).

All relevant materials (interview guidelines, leaflets, brochures, content for discussions and workshops) were translated into French and Italian by IAF staff members.

3 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Conceptually, we refer to the European Digital Competence Framework (Ferrari et al. 2013; Carretero et al., 2017; DigComp, 2020) that identifies five key components in digital competences: (1) Information and data literacy (2) Communication and collaboration (3) Digital content creation (4) Safety and (5) Problem solving. This competence framework we extended to a total of seven areas of competences. The seven categories hence describe an approach to a holistic range of digital competences. Further, we think it is a useable tool for an overall description of digital skills of individuals. The extended framework of the competence areas of digital skills moreover includes: (1) Basics and Access, (2) Search, Evaluate, Manage and Store, (3) Communicate, Collaborate and Participate, (4) Create and Design, (5) Protect and Act safely, (6) Problem solving and Acting (7) and Analyse and Reflect. We added the categories “Basics and Access” and “Analyse and Reflect” and differentiated the other areas by highlighting and naming the activities that describe each section more specifically by the skill content or competency (table 1). Increasingly, (public) services such as banking, shopping, and buying tickets for public transport are offered exclusively online. Using these services as an offline service generates costs for the customer or clients. Regarding older adults for instance, this is a disadvantage. Older adults increasingly are left behind when it comes to digital skills and use daily life (Seifert and Rössel 2019: 4). To address and discuss this issue at hand, we refer to Reisberg and Rhinesmith’s call not to focus on what how the divide or gaps are characterized but more on what is possible rather than what is missing or who is missing out (2020). This might provide a fresh approach moving away from a deficit-based perspective to a more asset-based perspective. This brings us one step further to identifying potential solutions, and alternatives to increase digital inclusion – and regarding the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic more social inclusion. Digital inclusion is not merely about being online or having a device connected but as well to build and maintain skills and

confidence (Ageing Better, 2021). In addition, Seifert et al. (2021) likewise assert that digital participation promotes social inclusion. We hope to point out from our findings, how active participation in digital skill courses, thus improvement of digital skills, may lower risks of social exclusion in society, particularly among older adults.

4 PRELIMINARY RESULTS

4.1 Findings from the Program Analysis

The 193 documents of course descriptions provide a wide range regarding topics and content of digital training. All courses, once a participant registered for it, are binding: Registration for the course is necessary in advance and often basic digital knowledge, i.e., access to a computer and an own email address, are required for the participation in digital training courses.

D_002: Getting started with the computer for seniors
[Einstieg in den Computer-Alltag für Senioren]

Description of the offer:

- use mouse and keyboard correctly > digital device
- > Basics and Access
- create and design simple text documents
- > Create and Design.
- create a simple document repository
- > Search, evaluate, manage and storage
- save documents
- > Search, Evaluate, Manage and Storage
- print documents-
- > Basics and Access
- use the internet for research etc.
- > Search, Evaluate, Manage and Storage
- know important terms from everyday computer life
- > unspecific

Original: [Beschreibung des Angebots]:

- Maus und Tastatur korrekt einsetzen
- einfache Textdokumente erstellen und gestalten
- eine einfache Dokumentenablage anlegen,
- Dokumente speichern
- Dokumente ausdrucken
- das Internet für Recherchen etc. benutzen
- wichtige Begriffe aus dem Computeraltag kennen

Box 1: Example of course description (cont.)

There are basic training courses that address a specific target group and others with an unspecific target group. The following is a typical example for a

beginner’s course: «Getting started with the computer» [Einstieg in den Computeralltag]. The adapted version for seniors reads as follows: «Getting started with the computer for seniors» [Einstieg in den Computeralltag für Senioren]. Some of the courses offered mainly concentrate on just one device at once, either smartphone, tablet, or computer.

Digital skills from the seven competence areas included in this illustrative example are: (1) Basics and Access (2) Search, Evaluate, Manage, and Store and (4) Create and Design. A more detailed look at one specific example illustrates what the course contents consist of, and which digital competencies are addressed therein (Box 1).

The last point from the description list “know important terms from everyday computer life” is rather unspecific. It can refer to basic concepts and functions as well as to more complex terms. Also, it is not clear if the last bullet point refers to an application level or a level of reflection. The course description of the example above then is completed by the goals of the course as follows (Box 2):

D_002: Getting started with the computer for seniors [Einstieg in den Computer-Alltag für Senioren]

Targets:
 Participants gain confidence and independence in using the PC and can use the mouse and keyboard in a targeted manner. The participants save their documents and know where to find them. On the Internet they quickly find the desired information.

Original: [Ziele]:
 Die Teilnehmenden gewinnen Sicherheit und Selbständigkeit im Umgang mit dem PC und können Maus und Tastatur gezielt nutzen.
 Die Teilnehmenden speichern ihre Dokumente und wissen, wo sie diese wiederfinden im Internet finden sie rasch die gewünschten Informationen.

Box 2: Example of course description (cont.)

D_028: Android Basis tablet course [Android Tablet Basis Kurs]

Prerequisites are first experience in using the device and an established Apple ID or Google account (mail address and password). The course takes place with your own device.

Original: Voraussetzung sind erste Erfahrungen in der Bedienung des Gerätes und ein eingerichtetes Apple-ID bzw. Google-Konto (Mail-Adresse und Passwort). Der Kurs findet mit dem eigenen Gerät statt.

Box 3: Example of course description (cont.)

Here, it is once again emphasized in clear terms which skills the participants will have mastered by the end of the course.

The sample of course descriptions include further courses dealing with specific programs like video, social media, and image processing. Others deal with typical applications for traveling and other daily businesses. Finally, job-specific continuing education courses make up a large part of the sample. Of these, several courses lie in digital marketing. In addition to the target group of seniors, unemployed, migrants and women and specific job groups are targeted.

The duration of the different courses is between a one-day course and courses that last for several months. The target groups of the courses vary a lot as well and mainly address seniors as being rather on a low level. Courses either address beginners or advanced learners. The sample includes courses which are only on demand. The description of these is formulated flexible and open, adaptable to the needs of the participants. It is striking that many course descriptions are optional formulated and express a flexibility of offers. This means that the objectives of the courses are missing (8 times) or not specifically mentioned (13 times), the level of competence is not decidable (29 times), there is no information about the content (16 times) or the prerequisites are formulated flexibly (5 times).

Finally, courses for moderate training needs are hardly to find, i.e., courses for potential participants who have basic knowledge but are not advanced. We can depict a high variation of courses in our sample. However, the program analysis does not point out whether all these listed courses took place or not.

Another interesting aspect to consider is the requirement of previous knowledge, access, or ability to get online and possessing the right hardware for the course. Basic digital knowledge (access to a computer and an own email address is a requirement for the participation in the course offers (34 times). Problem solving and Acting (6) and Analyse and Reflect (7) have less occurrence in the course descriptions. The chart (figure 1) shows the distribution of the competences provided in the course contents and which of the competences of the seven areas occur together frequently.

Interestingly, low-threshold course offerings offered at kursberatung.ch are more likely to be found in the Italian- and French-language course descriptions.

The most important result of the program analysis is that courses for moderate offerings are hardly to be found in Swiss adult education. The limitations of a program analysis also become clear, as it can only

capture the course descriptions but not the courses actually held. However, the analysis of the course descriptions offers important clues for the course providers, which we can pass on to them so that they can adapt their offers even better to the needs of people 50+ in Switzerland.

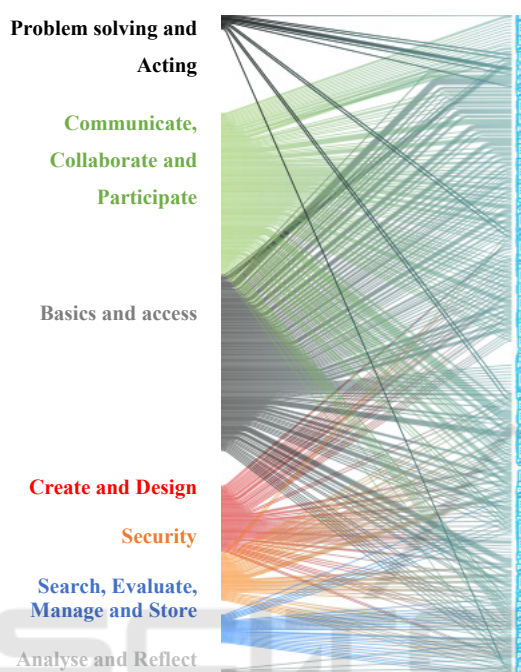


Figure 1: Distribution of the 7 competences in the provided course offers.

4.2 Findings from the Qualitative Interviews: Experiences

The set of questions that guide the qualitative part of the study aim at identifying the expectations, needs and motivations linked to course participation and the experiences participants have with attended courses. Resulting from the 20 qualitative semi-structured interviews, course experiences were both, positive and negative, whereas expectations, motivations and needs varied a lot. Variations are due to current living situation such as age and gender, personal life situation, interest and leisure activities and professional background and education which influence particularly the motives of course attendees significantly. Why attend a digital skills course? Personal motives and motivations among the sample varied a lot depending on their life situation. Those in working life were mainly suggested to attend a course by their employers as it is necessary for work.

4.2.1 External and Intrinsic Motivations

Particularly the Covid-19 pandemic forced many people to learn new modes and channels to teach or hold meetings despite lockdowns and social distancing. Thus, reasons for motivations are induced oftentimes by external factors of work environment. The aspect of necessity does not appear among those who are already retired. Intrinsic motivations are paramount here: Curiousness and independency. Private commitments and voluntary engagements in a club or association motivated interviewees to educate oneself and take part in courses. A 55-year-old male participant stated that, “As member of a choir where I am responsible for the development of a webpage, I recently educated myself in the field of web-design” (Interview #52). Further, during lockdown, home office requirements and quarantine in 2020 and 2021 people searched for activities at home, compatible with the restrictions. A 53-year-old woman mentioned, “I wanted to make use of my new free time during the pandemic lockdown and associated short-time work. In my case, I wanted to get to know new programs as my employer does not support or offer this, hence, I took matters into my own hands” (Interview #83)

4.2.2 Expectations Towards Digital Courses

In terms of expectations of the course, half of the interviewees mentioned that applicability and realization of what they have learned is of high relevance or as one interviewee stated, “(Important is) that I can apply 100 percent of what I have learned” (Interview #22). The qualitative investigation revealed that most of the interviewees could apply everything during the course. However, at home they often found themselves helpless and wish some guidance (through materials from the course, videos, or a digital coach).

Further, course participants expected the course instructor to be competent in their respective areas they taught. Talking about this issue a 68-year old woman said, “My expectations lie in a varied design of the course and good didactic skills of the course instructor (...) The teacher should therefore have in-depth “know-how”, so that all questions can be answered. The teacher must know what she or he is talking about” (Interview 19). Another expectation or rather wish for future courses was that course participants should be on the same level and the participants should fit together as a group, also regarding the participant’s age. The composition of the group of 68-year-old female interviewee was, “(..) mixed in terms of age. This made it difficult to carry

out the course in general as young people always went forward quickly. My age group was rather slow” (Interview #16). A purposeful pre-selection of group participants prior to the course starts or at time of registration would be desirable, i.e., to determine the level of knowledge of a participant to enable homogeneous groups regarding the course level. However, in one case, the participant thought that mixed groups are better: “The group composition should be mixed in terms of professional backgrounds, gender and age in order to have exciting interactions and to benefit from a diversity of experiences”. While this interviewee benefited from a mixed setting, others felt excluded, or cannot follow the course in a faster tempo.

A general expectation for on-site courses was a complete and working infrastructure, including good acoustics, course spaces that are easy to find and access, and nice environment for breaks (i.e., possibility to go outside).

4.2.3 Course Search: How Do I Find the Suitable Course?

The majority of the interviewees found it easy to search for courses. In many cases they were informed by their personal network or read it in leaflets or brochures that target older adults in society. Interviewees aged under 65 years, those who are still in working life, are mainly recommended to attend digital skill courses by their employer. However, a 55-year-old woman found the search of courses overwhelming as the number of provided services on the internet are endless. She mentioned: «Simple is an exaggeration. It is no fun. It [online search] is not comparable to brochures. The online handling is not intuitive, when you have to click on each and everything. The overview is totally missing, an overall view would be helpful and important” (Interview #81). Overall interviewees mentioned a confusing numbers of courses and providers and the concomitant challenge of finding the right course which suits their needs and at the same time is a trustworthy and offer good-quality courses. The woman who mentioned not being amused with online course search added, that it particularly helped her though to search specific websites, i.e., for digital skill courses tailored for seniors. Often the search did not stop on the individual online-search. Interviewees often mentioned asking their friends, colleagues at work or relatives for further information.

4.2.4 In Person or Remote?

The Covid-19 pandemic had an enormous impact on how courses are taught, in presence or virtual. Three thirds of the interviewees preferred traditional classroom training and face-to-face learning. Underlying reason are social exchange during breaks and after the course, joint learning, good atmosphere among the participants, and direct support from course instructor. Active participation during the course was rated higher than for the virtual courses. Nonetheless, course participants were partially intimidated or felt ashamed to ask Virtual courses demand high concentration and prevent active contribution to the course. Further, the interviewees who attended both formats, tended to evaluate virtual courses as poorer in quality than courses taught face-to-face. Particularly, interviewees aged 60+ preferred to attend the course in presence, whereas those still in professional life preferred virtual courses, as it saves time and costs questions in front of a group in presence, especially when there were younger participants around.

5 DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE KNOW SO FAR ABOUT DIGITAL PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE AGED 50+?

The variety in both, course offers in the program analysis as well as the most diverse experiences and motivations of older adults aged 50+, show that the social group of “older adults” are a heterogenous group. With the preliminary results presented in this paper, it can be suggested that course offers need to be customized to the requirements and wishes of potential participants and continuously adjusted.

We found in the program analysis that a broad range of courses and topics are offered. However, it is difficult to reach a conclusion based on the 193 course descriptions to what extent these courses helped the participants to increased digital participation. The course descriptions are at times rather unspecific. This point was as well reflected in the individual interviews.

Only a few descriptions of courses deal explicitly with specific everyday issues such as buying a ticket for public transport online, using Online Banking or using online payment (e.g., Apple Pay).

Table 1: Description of the categories and the associated skills that belong to each competence area.

Category	Description course target
(1) Basics and Access	Digital device: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Putting into operation - Dealing with input mode (with mouse, keyboard) - Access digital content (e.g., Internet) - Access various functionalities (e.g., programs, apps)
(2) Search, Evaluate, Manage and Store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for information and data in different digital environments (Google, Wikipedia, daily newspapers online, etc.) (dealing with the Internet) - Use and adapt search strategies - Identify relevant sources (media literacy, being able to interpret seriousness) - Evaluate, interpret & critically assess sources and information - Store information & data securely, find them again
(3) Communicate, Collaborate and Participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate with others using various digital capabilities (e.g., devices, programs, apps) - Share digital content (e.g., files, links, images) with others - Use digital tools for collaboration (e.g., to merge or collaborate on information/data) - Actively engage and participate in society by using digital services (e.g., online services, public transport tickets, tax declaration, sharing knowledge e.g., in social networks, online communities) - Recognize and apply rules of conduct (netiquette) in digital exchange and collaboration
(4) Create and Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply various formats and editing tools (e.g., word processing, image creation, spreadsheet programs) - Process information, content, and existing digital products (e.g., text, image, graphic documents) and insert these into existing knowledge to create new contents - Recognize meaning of copyright, right of use, and intellectual property, refer to sources, and acquire rights in use - Develop instructions for a computer system (e.g., programming)
(5) Protect and Act safely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize risks and dangers in the digital environment (e.g., websites or e-mails with fraudulent intentions (e.g., phishing mails) - Protect content, personal data and privacy in the digital environment (e.g., do not disclose private data online, use secure passwords and anti-virus programs) - Set security settings and keep them up to date - Recognize health risks and addiction risks when using digital technologies and protect themselves and others (e.g., ergonomics, addiction risk).
(6) Problem solving and Acting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solve technical problems in the operation of devices themselves - Identify own needs and recognize the digital tools or technical solutions to problems for this purpose - Use different digital tools depending on the situation - Recognize knowledge gaps in the use of digital tools and find, evaluate, and use digital learning opportunities - Recognize and understand functionalities and basic principles of the digital world (e.g., underlying algorithms)
(7) Analyse and Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize and critically question the design means of digital media and its effect. - Recognize opportunities and risks of media use in different areas of life - Recognize the importance of digital media and use them in a self-regulated manner - Awareness that digital skills need to be regularly updated - Assess the impact of technologies and technology use for the environment

Target group-oriented courses for seniors are received very differently. Especially because of our results that more and more seniors are still working (as our interview results show), it is important to offer specialized courses also for self-employed seniors

and not to withhold them only to individual professional groups.

The 20 qualitative individual interviews gave relevant insights into participants' experiences regarding digital skill training courses. Reasons and

motivations we found in our data for participation in digital training are social contact and exchange and engaging socially. These activities were not possible during lockdowns, hence many mentioned they enjoyed direct personal contact and that they appreciated particularly on-site courses which are face-to-face. Especially the breaks were mentioned to be important as well for course participation, to even only meet up socially with other people their age and exchange views and experiences. This also accords with earlier observations from Chopik (2016) who notice the importance of the social aspect in digital training. He emphasizes the benefits of using technology for social connection between older adults. The Covid-19 pandemic strengthened this need of exchange and social contact. It seems that participating in digital training helps older adults aged 50+ to generate contacts and social exchange. Our preliminary findings in this research article are so far in line with similar studies such as the interdisciplinary multi-case study of Pihlainen et al. (2022) which have shown that the majority of older adults (50+) mentioned hobby, social contacts and staying active in old age as main reasons for digital participation and course taking.

Of course, some of the participants attended the courses for other reasons: To learn something new to stay independent in the foreseeable future and not burden their adult children. However, important reasons and intrinsic motivation were for instance, to improve digital skills to apply these to improve club activities. Being able to contribute actively to something that is important for them, their hobby, improves self-esteem and life quality. This finding is consistent to Benvenuti et al. (2020) who found that technology is beneficial for the quality of life and well-being of older adults. It is encouraging to compare our results of intrinsic motivation of participants with those of Pihlainen et al. (2022) who found that many are motivated by own interest to learn something, to stay active and independent. Therefore, digital participation per se and course attendance is linked also to curiosity and pleasure. In our sample we especially also found voices stating that they wanted to use their new free time during lockdowns meaningful.

Interviewees also mentioned that they want to stay up to date regarding the use of digital devices but as well society or external factors would pressure them to engage digitally. Pihlainen et al. (2022) as well demonstrate out of their data, that older adults feel socially pressured to deal with modern technology or a certain device (p. 10). Notwithstanding, the Covid-19 pandemic forced work and school to go digital as

16 working participants in our sample mentioned they attended digital training because of their employer and due to Covid-19 restrictions for work and school.

In terms of expectations and experiences course participants made our results support the idea of adjusting course descriptions to more detailed and explicit descriptions. It would be desirable to have course descriptions that address target groups better, hence group composition would as well be better. A further wish of the interviewees was that the courses should be easier accessible, i.e., not only advertised online but as well printed in leaflets or newsletters or similar. Or, how Reuter et. al (2021) claim, to include older adults actively in the process of creating digital contents and offers. This step would as well facilitate the inclusion and support of older adults in digital participation. In many ways digital participation or knowledge and digital skills enrich social life. For example, being able to create a website for the choir club is an active contribution which flashes over to self-esteem, being an important part of a social group, and well-being in everyday life.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OUTLOOK

This study set out to assess offers of digital training courses across Switzerland and the experiences of course participants with regards to their needs. So far, based on the data from the qualitative part of this study (program analysis and interviews), we can point out on the diversity of the group of older adults which is stated in the manifoldness of course offers as well as in the individual experiences made. The study has shown that digital participation or digital skills transition into private life, i.e., hobbies, hence also participation or inclusion in social life.

The research paper at hand is limited to the fact that we focused mainly on the qualitative data for this paper as the study is still ongoing. Further, while the qualitative results may not be representable for entire Switzerland, it offers valuable insights of individuals who participated in digital training and stated their one-to-one experiences.

What we could show here is that in general heterogeneity must be acknowledged for both, the target group of older adults and the topics of course trainings. Participants can only benefit from digital training if the courses are tailored to their needs and wishes. An “one-size-fits all” approach is also not in favour of Pihlainen et al. (2022) who executed their

study for the neighbouring countries Germany, Austria, and Finland.

Nonetheless, the investigation of course offers showed generally that these are unfortunately not explicitly tailored to the target groups and should be adjusted. The preliminary data presented here suggests that the majority of course providers need to adjust their course offers and descriptions. For example, not addressing the right target group limits the opportunity of possible participants. Few course offers were explicitly for “older adults” or retirees, but middle-aged adults close to around 50 years are not addressed at all. Hence, from the data already available and the results presented here, we suggest that course providers should

- adjust their course descriptions to more clear and explicit descriptions;
- address the target group better to ensure better group composition (size of group and age mix);
- make information about courses more accessible, i.e., not only advertised online but as well printed on leaflets;
- offer more courses for people with moderate training needs;
- invest in recruitment strategies for people with little or no digital skills at all;
- offer individual training besides other course formats;
- adjust the training offers to the latest technical developments;
- provide material (videos, instructions) for follow-up to the course participants.

The aim of the study *Digital Skills and Training Needs of 50+. A Study Beyond the Digital Divide* is to provide best practice recommendations for Practitioners working with older adults and to add to this list of suggestions in a further step. This paper shows preliminary results towards an elaborated recommendations product.

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