

***“Send me a WhatsApp when you arrive home”: Mediated practices of caring about.***

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## **1. Introduction**

Interest in technology for older adults is driven by multiple developments and interests: the growth of the aging population worldwide, the increase in both the life expectancy and number of persons with disability and chronic illnesses, the surge of people who are lonely; and also the interest on the innovative potential of recent technologies, the growing costs of caring for the older people and the pressure that the need of care is putting on society. These trends have contributed to discourses and convictions that technology have an important role in fixing these “problems” (Neven and Peine, 2017), and can make possible to improve the quality of life and independence of older people, potentially reducing societal costs. One of these convictions remarks the potential of connectedness technologies to counteract social isolation and loneliness by supporting older people to remain connected to their families and friends, communities and to the world (i.e. Waycott et al., 2019). There is a growing body of research studying the effects of Information and Communication

Technologies (ICTs) on older people connectedness (REF). What is striking is, that in a context where the debates about the negative effects of social media are very alive, there are barely critical stances based on older people, and research and technological innovations tend to embrace a techno-optimistic view (Meshi et al., 2019).

However, very few research about social media, later life and social connectedness has studied this as a “matter of care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011), looking in depth at the pragmatics of how this technology is used and studying affects, rather than effects.

This chapter aims to add the emotional and affective dimensions of people’s relationships to the study of the technologized landscapes of care (Milligan and Wiles, 2010) in later life by analysing social connectedness and mediated ‘care about’ (López-Gómez, 2019). The chapter pays particular attention to the **socio-technical-material** arrangements of ‘care about’ that are assembled in everyday life. In doing so, it describes how everyday life social connectedness is experienced in social media, and analyses participants’ digital practices (Schatzki, 2002) as a form of mediated ‘care about’. Thus, this chapter studies social media and later life, contextualizing technologies in the concrete situations in which they are experienced and attending to the social and material dimensions of how they are configured (Wanka and Gallistl, 2018), understood and used. We assume that later life co-evolves with the social practices and these, in turn, have material configurations (Peine, Faulkner, Jæger, et al., 2015).

After briefly introducing what do we mean by being connected, we begin with a discussion bringing together literatures on techno-care, gerontology and social connectedness to sketch a definition of ‘care about’ that will be tested with empirical data. This is followed by a detailed analysis of mediated caring about practices through vignettes. We suggest that social media can be a technology for ‘care about’. Eventually, the chapter attempts to understand the kind of caring about that emerges in these concrete situations and discusses what technology innovation for ageing can learn from understanding older people practices in social media.

## **2. Being connected and everyday life: emotions and affects**

Relationships, emotions and affects are key ingredients of our social life from a relational sociology perspective (Crossley, 2010). Being connected is a human quality. We

connect to people, ideas, things, animals and places in many different ways and the role of social connectedness technologies is crucial in this milieu in Western societies, including in later life (Gilleard et al., 2015). Being meaningfully connected is done through a variety of practices in later life –within communities (Nimrod, 2010), in particular physical places (Hodge et al., 2017), using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Jones, 2015) or through mundane acts of care (López Gómez, 2015), among others.

Being connected means being together, being related to somebody or something, being present or co-present at distance, accompany, belong to and be part of. There are many gestures in social interaction that are key for the understanding of the emotional and affective dimensions of being connected. For many, social media cannot make up for the need of physical contact in the form of a hug, a kiss or a caress. For others, there are many acts, emotions and feelings that can be expressed and experienced at distance and mediated by technologies (Beneito-Montagut, 2015a; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Little and routine acts of human contact, such as a gesture, a “smile” in the form of an emoji, a brief “how are you feeling this morning?” are part of what makes social connectedness up, as does the need to talk and be listened. Humans engage in these kinds of relational practices because we ‘care about’ others and when people lack these types of connections in everyday life, social isolation and loneliness can arise. In this chapter, we make the case for thinking about the need for social connectedness as a matter of ‘caring about’ and consider ‘care about’ as an essential ingredient to multiple aspects of our social life (Lawson, 2007)<sup>1</sup> and an affective force (Andrews et al., 2013).

To frame our study, we want to clarify our position regarding the mundane and the technology. The idea of looking at the ordinary follows the approach of ‘little arrangement that matter’ (López Gómez, 2015), which considers the (dis)orderliness that already exists, from the ordinary and the mundane of the ‘neglected things’ and their capacity to affect or ‘move’ (Latimer, 2018). The focus on mediated social connectedness as mundane practices in which persons, social processes, things and bodies interact, permits for the exploration of under investigated forms of ‘care about’ as a possibility. Communication technologies open up possibilities for communication and care which underpin the idea that technology brings

<sup>1</sup> Although this chapter focuses in later life, we assume that care is essential in all life stages, and social connectedness and their lack affects everybody. Moreover, this research assumes that older people should not be categorized as a monolithic and homogenous group either hence to treat their care needs as different from the needs of others is somehow critical.

options that are contingent to the circumstances. That is not to deny that these possibilities come with tensions, and ways of making worlds which hide diversities or exclude based on age, as will be shown in the empirical part. Regarding the on-going technological debates about the pros and cons of social media, first, we subscribe to the idea that technologies are not shiny, smooth, instrumental and effective or, on the contrary, evil, abject and failures (Mol et al. 2010; Law and Singleton 2000, Law 2002; Latour 2002; Oudshoorn & Pinch 2005; Habers 2005). They usually have a variety of effects and affects that differ with the circumstances of use too. Consequently, the possibilities are not always positive or negative. This is one of the reasons that takes us away from making prescriptive recommendations about what technology should be used for or how should be used. The second reason is to draw back from ageing-and-innovation normative discourses that assume technologies will fix all ageing troubles, from independent living (Neven, 2015; Neven and Peine, 2017) to social connectedness (Beneito-Montagut et al., 2018).

### **3. Care and social media technologies**

In this section we consider existing work around care, technology, gerontology and social connectedness and discuss how these bodies of literature can be linked up to fill a gap (Andrews and Duff, 2019) in the study of social media as everyday life technologies for ageing, particularly for sustaining meaningful social connections.

First, we introduce what we mean by ‘care about’ and its relation to social connectedness. Put it simply, in the mainstream gerontology literature care is the provision of practical and emotional support (Barnes, 2005): the former is ‘care for’ (Tronto, 1993) and the later ‘care about’. ‘Care for’ defines the caring act when somebody is precisely attending to another person in need of care –generally considered ill, frail, disabled, children or older. ‘Caring about’ refers to those aspects of care related to being emotionally concerned about someone else wellbeing (Pratesi, 2017) and attending to their emotional needs. More recently in STS, the concept of ‘care about’ has broaden its meaning to refer to being affected, moved, concerned and even touched by someone or something to which there is an attachment (López-Gómez, 2019; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011; Schrader, 2015). Care is understood as an affective state, hence concern and care are strongly related. However, care has stronger affective connotations than concern (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This chapter explores the application of this later concept of ‘care about’ in kin relationships to study social

connectedness and social media in later life. This way of understanding ‘care about’ compels to attend to the micro-dynamics of the social relationships and to the materialities of mediated connectedness.

In recent gerontology literature, social connectedness and social media have been mostly treated as disconnected to places and things. Social connection is considered an immaterial inner force that only appeals to our cognition, not to our bodies and things in our surroundings. This is in part consequence of early research that tended to focus on ICTs possibilities to connect geographically dispersed or physically isolated people (i.e. home-bound). Thus, overlooking both the role of social media in local and situated social relationships and the materialities of distant relationships.

There is a well-established and growing body of research<sup>2</sup> studying the potential of technologies to enhance social connectedness in older people (i.e. Gilleard et al., 2015; Hutto et al., 2015; Jones, 2015; Neves and Vetere, 2019). Studies of technology adoption (Francis et al., 2019) have consistently reported that social connectedness with family and friends is one of the main drivers for older people to use these technologies. Indeed, the possibilities of ICTs to enhance social connectivity have been a topic of interest since the popularisation of the Internet in Western societies. These have been studied from different approaches. For instance, social network analysis has focused on the formation of bonds and what the kind of relationships social media platforms sustain in later life (i.e. Pfeil et al., 2009). Studies about the effects of ICTs found that these technologies can support older people to feel better connected to other individuals, the community and the broader society (Lehning et al., 2010; Nimrod, 2010). However, recently some critical voices have started to look at the negative effects on social connection (Meshi et al., 2019). However, none of this research is framed around the concept of ‘care about’ and barely applies material approaches. Moreover, many of these studies have been done searching for effectivity and under interventionist logics (Beneito-Montagut et al., 2018; Peine and Neven, 2011).

On the other hand, there is generally little research in STS devoted to the analysis of social media as a technological innovation in relation to ageing and there is even less research focusing on the mundane aspects of them. Until recently, STS scholars have overlooked social media technologies, because they generally study those “grand” technologies that are

<sup>2</sup> For an detailed literature review about social connectedness and ICTs see Beneito-Montagut et al. (2018).

perceived as important, world challenging or addressing global issues. Consequently, STS studies tend to overlook technologies that affect mundane aspects of everyday life and focus on, for instance, industrial machinery, genomics, artificial intelligence and techno-care technologies (Wajcman, 2010). Yet there are strands in STS (i.e. gender and domestication studies) that have focused on the mundane (Höppner and Urban, 2018; Joyce and Loe, 2011) and studied social media technologies (Martin and Pilcher, 2017). The same trend is observed in the STS/geron-technology research area. A lot of emphasis is being made on “important” technologies such as genomics, telecare, assistive living technologies, digital health technologies, artificial intelligence, robots (Peine, Faulkner, Jæger, et al., 2015); and less interest is drawn towards ordinary and quotidian connectedness technologies beyond the approach introduced above. Social media technologies have also been overlooked by those studies that examine the materialities of care (Buse et al., 2018; Oudshoorn, 2012; Schillmeier et al., 2010) because this research is usually done from a ‘health and illness’ perspective rather than an everyday life one –and on one hand, institutional settings are barely incorporating social media among their innovative technologies, and on the other, the studies focused on the everyday life of those ill or those caring for ill people (Buse and Twigg, 2018).

As a consequence of the disconnection among these bodies of literature, we still do not know much about how the micro-care that matters is (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011) in the context of ageing and social media technologies, particularly in relation to the possibilities of ‘caring about’ in social media. To sum up, so far social media have not been studied as a potential place of and for ‘care about’ as it has been studied as a cognitive force rather than an affective one, disregarding their material and situated dimensions. In this chapter care about is understood as a complex, multifaceted and contingent practice. It is an open-ended process with no clear boundaries (Mol, 2008).

#### **4. Methodology**

The chapter draws on a funded<sup>3</sup> study which ethnographically explored the everyday uses of social media in later life. The research was conducted across four socio-cultural centres –called ‘casals’ in Catalunya–, homes, cafes and a University for older people. These places were all located in Barcelona city and a rural town of Catalonia. Regarding its

<sup>3</sup> This Research has been funded by Recercaixa/ACUP (Spain) under Grant No. 2012ACUP-00325.

methodological orientation, following the Erickson and Stull's (1998) classic approach, a "digital" team ethnography was carried out (Beneito-Montagut et al., 2017). This is a multi-situated (Marcus, 1995) and user-centred approach that focuses on everyday life practices and on the situated micro-dynamics within encounters among people; people and technology, and people, technology and people (Beneito-Montagut, 2011).

Between 2014 and 2016, we met, interviewed –face-to-face– and interacted online with 20 older adults, half of them living in an urban area of Barcelona (Spain) and the other half living in a semi-rural area close to the city. As a selection criterion, all the key informants were social media and computer users. The sample was diverse in terms of gender (11 men and 9 women), marital status and who they live with, and age (ranging from 65 to 80). On the other hand, it was similar and rather homogeneous in terms of their social class (middle-class), non-migrant background and all of them were living independently in their own homes.

The research was based on a multi-methods approach –digital and face-to-face–, which included participant observations, entry and exit interviews and online participant observations in several social media platforms. In some occasions, we also visited key informants at their homes, and met with them in public spaces, such as cafes. We collected digital data and recorded their "public" interactions on digital spaces. We collected data (leaflets, policy documents, learning resources and so on) from the 'casals' and the policy programmes that fund ICT workshops and courses in the centres. All the data were included in NVivo for subsequent coding and analysis by the researchers. NCapture was also used to gather data from social media. Analysis was emergent and an ongoing iterative process. All of this in order to get a thick description of social media practices in later everyday life.

A symbolic interactionist theory was used (Goffman, 1961), focusing on how individuals actively participate in their online and offline environments. We turned our attention to how people's social interactions with others, digital artefacts, things and spaces assembled. This necessarily meant looking at the tightly entangled relationships between the material (places and things) and the symbolic. We believe that technology, considering both artefacts and interfaces, create worlds and meanings. For instance, the ownership (or lack thereof) of a certain digital device might be a symbol of social position within a group, and the design of the artefact has embedded determined socio-cultural scripts, or pre-defined

scenarios of use (Akrich, 1992) that afford or hinder specific actions. Careful ethical considerations were taken regarding all the methods and data collection/generation procedures, both online and offline. All participants were informed and gave their consent to be observed by a team of researchers.

For this chapter, we present our findings through vignettes to illustrate how mediated social connectedness is and what notions of 'care about' are enacted in its practices. A vignette is a short story about hypothetical characters in particular circumstances and contexts; and the vignettes are crafted here as a strategy to present research data (Vinz et al., 2003). Each vignette has a narrative structure similar to a story that is limited to a short period of time, to one key actor and to a delimited space. They are used as a way of presenting the voices of the older people. Its relevance, both epistemological and methodological, lies in an understanding of them as vivid histories of practices (Erickson, 1985). In practical terms, we conceptualise a vignette as a description of a series of events around key actors chosen to be representative, typical or emblematic of the digital and non-digital practices of older adults who participated in the research. Hence, the vignettes presented below represent different lively stories about social connectedness, technology and age.

## **5. Mediated caring about practices**

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the telephone (Loe, 2010), mobile phones (Wajcman et al., 2008) and social media technologies is their use for the micro-organization and scheduling of quotidian and mundane arrangements among family members, friends or communities (Haddon, 2004; Ling, 2004; Ling and Haddon, 2003). The broad adoption of communication technologies in later life (Gilleard et al., 2015) is linked to the geographical and temporal arrangements that family members and other social groups experience in everyday life. Mediated care about practices can be observed while these mundane arrangements and social interactions happen. Social media technologies enact co-presence online in both proximal and distant relationships (Beneito-Montagut, 2015b). But in order to turn the mediated co-presence into affective presence and feeling of attachment, something else is necessary. We look at this necessary something else, or in other words, at the socio-material elements (such as text messages, organisation of visits, phone calls,



sharing of photos and daily routines), which are embedded in everyday life and have a part in producing the feeling of being socially connected and might, then, turn into ‘care about’.

We built up on the ‘care about’ concept presented before to analyse mediated social connectedness by drawing on Carmen’s and her family social media practices. Although the narration is plotted around Carmen’s relationships, the following vignettes reflect on the experiences of many of the participants of this research.

### **5.1. Mediated Affects in WhatsApp**

*“Gente que te va... Estás como muy conectada todo el tiempo.”*

*“People that come to you... You are like very connected all the time”*

The quote is from a conversation with Carmen and refers to the feeling of connectedness that the smartphone gives to her. She is 69 and lives with her husband in a middle-class neighbourhood of Barcelona. She has two sons who live away from her. She owns a desktop computer –located in a bedroom in her house that belonged to one of her children–; a smartphone and, during the research project, she acquired a tablet. While she is very skilled using the smartphone and social media, she constantly denies it and considers herself as clumsy regarding technology. She has been learning how to use the smartphone and other technologies with her children and classmates (as she regularly attends German lessons). Carmen mainly uses WhatsApp. Our very first communication was a telephone conversation to arrange the first interview. Soon after, she got in touch via WhatsApp to re-schedule the interview. She was very busy and didn’t realise that double-booked herself. A few days later we talked over WhatsApp again. The conversation started because she wanted to talk with somebody else and sent us a text by mistake. We took the opportunity to chat with her and did about a recent holiday trip. She was brief in her sentences. She also used emoticons. She took some time to answer. Two days later she sent us a photo without any particular purpose with a touching text about happiness that claims “happiness is only real when is shared” (first photo in figure 1).



Figure 1: A selection of touching and affective memes collected via the mediated interactions with participants.

Sharing this kind of touching visual artefacts is a very common practice among the key informants. We observed in Carmen, and in many other participants, that there is a fascination for consuming and sharing visual and multimedia, and in some cases, even for creating multimedia content. They constantly shared memes, photos and videos, mainly through WhatsApp or **email** chains, but also on Facebook.

From the moment we established a communication channel through WhatsApp, Carmen started sending us regularly lots of photos: of recent travels with her family, the Graduation of her son; photos of herself with other people volunteering for a Food Bank, and so on, although she never published them on Facebook. Very few words, if any, but lots of photos and other visual material. And again, she sent us an emotive video about Christmas and photos of her first new-born grandchild. It is obvious that these digital practices are important for Carmen and act as movements that signal and construct connectedness. They enact temporal proximity at distance –and no-simultaneously– and are an example of little and irrelevant communicative acts, that become encounters, with capacity to affect and being affected. The feeling of being connected with somebody is triggered by sending and receiving a photo, supported by the technology and the affordances (double blue or grey ticks) that signal this process. For instance, this connectedness and affective act accrues around a tender image and some text sent through WhatsApp to somebody. The digital artefact comprises not just visuals and text, but also personal and cultural contexts, experiences, cultural codes and

norms of conduct, and other relations that are particular to that event. It moved Carmen, then she sent it to somebody else who she ‘cares about’, and then she shared it broadly to a group of people that she might care or not, constituting an infrastructure through which affects flows and ‘care about’ practices could be materialized. These relational and affective practices mean and signal the establishment of a communicative channel to do ‘care about’. There is an undeniable capacity of these practices to affect or move, and become caring about, the question remains to who and what do they make to social connectedness more broadly.

## **5.2. Who cares? Or who sets the expectations of ‘care about’ in social media**

Although this practice of sharing affective digital artefacts is very common among old social media users, younger generations tend to contest it. And, through their lack of engagement, a subtle form of exclusion by practice emerges. In this section, we are going to deepen in these practices and what they make to social connectedness when generate trouble.

Referring to these sharing practices and her mediated relationships with her children, Carmen explained: “they tell me ‘mum, above all, do not send us anything, we don’t have time!’”. Her children don’t care about these digital artefacts. While she explains to us that her children asked her to stop sending all this stuff. Carmen continues: “I told them, ‘Yes, yes, yes...’”; as emphasizing that she already knows that they do not want her to send these, they do not have time to engage in these practices. From the tone of her voice transpires the feeling of boredom that one experiences when is being constantly reminded, over and over again, something already well known. But it also leaks the idea that she will continue doing the same. She will continue sending unimportant stuff, photos, videos, messages, in spite of being fully aware about her being a “nuisance” and the lack of interest. This reinforces the idea of how relevant these practices are for her and for the maintenance of the infrastructure for ‘caring about’, while opens up questions about deserving or not deserving attention, and to what extend attention is always necessary in for this mediated connectedness. There are many alibis that support children inattentiveness, they don’t have time, they are tech savy and cannot wait for the slow typing, or they need to attend to “important things”. But, in many cases such as Carmen and her family, particularly considering her children’s inattentiveness, the affective practice illustrates that the digital artefact is not merely a marker that connects Carmen with her children. The digital artefact is all about the multiple layers enabled through

affects, emotions and moving messages across which social organisation flows too. The relevance of attention (in the mediated affective encounter) is contingent to the personal relationship layer rather than to the technological capacities of social media, and the ‘care about’ infrastructure is enabled anyway. The strong feeling of attachment between Carmen and her children is what makes this contested practice a mediated ‘care about’ exemplar, not the technology per se. She still feels connected to them in spite of being excluded because of her digital practices, as we can see in the following quote regarding the connectedness by voice calls and messages with her sons:

“Because I don’t need more, I don’t need to speak to him every day. I only need to know that he is ok. And later, he calls me if he’s got time. When he finishes supper, he calls.”

Carmen talked about the regular contacts by phone with her son as an important quotidian practice. She explained that she asks for a WhatsApp text as soon as he arrives home after driving back to his home from Barcelona. This is a frequently observed practice on social media among the participants of this research that make up for social connectedness and involve ‘care about’, which is enacted as part of the everyday liveness within social relationships. It is a quick and non-invasive “check in” and an important regular communicative act that is inscribed into their daily routines. It is materialized by the affective layer described before. It works as a continuity of sharing everyday liveness, in the form of mundane and irrelevant photos or a short text, instead of acting as a form of control or too much ‘care about’ (REF of social surveillance). Likewise, the technology is not experienced as coercive (Mort et al., 2013), indeed it disappears and becomes irrelevant. It is another node of the unnoticed care about infrastructure (López-Gómez, 2019).

Carmen, as many participants of this research, prioritizes certain practices of social connectedness, even when some of them are contested, cause trouble and exclusion. She is being excluded for engaging in a type of practice that she and other older people like but doesn’t follow the normative way of acting in social media imposed by technological scripts and younger generations. Carmen is being told what not to do in a condescending and patronising way for being old. In spite of this, she still experiences her children’s being co-present in social media. There is an affective force (care about) and room for agency and choice.

### 5.3. Temporal and materials arrangements of caring about

However, when furthering on the examination of quotidian mediated communicative acts, we present another example of mediated care about which is not only related with co-presence at distance but encompasses proximity and material arrangements. Yet, more importantly, reciprocity emerges as one of the main characteristics of this relationship. On this occasion, Carmen's children use social media to materialize 'care about'. Carmen explains:

“And with them [her children], well, maybe ... they rather, for instance, if it is raining ... one of them asks [through WhatsApp] ‘did you get soaked?’. And we [her and her husband] says ‘no darling, we didn’t, we’ve got an umbrella’ (laughing). Because they see us as very old (laughing again) and that’s how they care for us, in that sense. Or, if it’s very cold they say, ‘don’t go out’. And then, we do whatever we think is right. But well... they are happy as Larry [ironic tone] (...). My husband says, ‘as they cannot see us... then...’. But they keep sending messages like those. Or yesterday, our eldest, who lives in a city at 45 minutes’ drive from Barcelona, sent a message (WhatsApp) at 7 am, asking if we could go to his home to take care of his dog because she was very poorly. And then, that kind of thing.”

From Carmen's narrative a double articulation arises about caring and being cared about with a sudden move on her arguments from describing how she experiences being cared about to explaining how she cares about him too. The concept of mutual care and reciprocity is enacted here. Carmen and her husband are cared about at distance by their children using social media for everyday life matters (“do not forget the umbrella”). In the first scene, where she is cared about, she presents herself in a humorous way as viewed by the younger –that is old and in need of care– but a challenge to this vision is offered in her narrative. On one hand, it seems relevant for her and her husband to situate themselves as agentic agents that can make their own decisions and know how to take care of themselves, challenging their children's construction of them as somebody who needs to be cared. However, instead of being experienced as too much 'care about', which can become harmful, this articulation of caring about opens up an agentic possibility –as “they cannot see us”, they do whatever they want– and is perceived as an affective force although a paternalistic form of

control too. On the other hand, in the same extract, a second caring scene is articulated when she explains how social media supports the temporal and mundane family arrangements regarding caring for a pet in this case. The shift in her narrative about her son asking for help appears to underscore the ‘caring about’ quality of the relationship rather than an understanding of it as an instrumental task or work. Moreover, in this case, the mediated care is materialized in proximity and what it shows is that these affective mediated practices allow them to situate themselves as ‘care about’ givers and ‘care about’ takers. It is important to highlight the reciprocity of the relationship as this inter-dependency is possible because they care about each other. Inter-dependency here is conceived as functional relationships of mutual dependence between people, technologies and places. The notion of inter-dependency is key to understand how humans connect across situated contexts (online/offline, local/remote, proximal/distant) and across different positions (sender/receiver, giver/taker). Moreover, social media, in this case, can be experienced as ‘assistive’ (Loe, 2010) and ‘active’ simultaneously; and non-coercive.

## **6. Mediated social connectedness: thinking of social media as ‘techno-care about’**

An exploration of the practices assembled by older people and their families in everyday life has enabled to investigate underexplored ways of mediated ‘care about’. We have described situations of mediated social connectedness, without neglecting the tensions, troubles and exclusions, and paying attention to how the technology and the concrete situations shape the experience of ‘caring about’. Mediated care about, then, is compounded by all those emotional and affective relational practices that are assembled, among others, through connectivity and sharing everydayness. The infrastructures for ‘caring about’ that emerge through these mediated connectedness practices are characterized by being affective, agentic, mutual and inter-dependent. Doing things for each other, including little digital acts of affection, can be part of a form of ‘caring about’ that is key in building care infrastructures to ease social isolation. And what is more important, if we do not forget that being connected is a human quality the practices that emerge in this study constitute important technologized “occasions for care [about] as any of the more heroic aspects of healthcare” (Latimer, 2018).

A lot of attention has been drawn towards the design, development and adoption of sustainable healthcare and wellbeing systems and the deployment of innovative technologies to these ends. One of the recent so-called challenges in the ageing society is social isolation

and loneliness. Yet, technology and policy design are generally concerned for the “user” and “their uses”, overlooking that the techno-care infrastructures are far more complex than the user and the technology. We propose to care about our technologies (López-Gómez, 2019) too, and as part of that agenda, we need to think about what social media do (or undo) for older people social connectedness. Studying what “grand” technologies can do for care is important, however, little attention has been paid to social media as a technology that affects social relationships, places and things in relation to ageing. As seen, previous studies have looked at connectedness and relationships in terms of quantity and quality of the social networks, community and belonging, support obtained through the technology and effects of use in health and wellbeing. But there is, certainly a need to move towards more comprehensive inquiries that require a more relational approach to match the relational, multi-situated and processual world they engage (Andrews and Duff, 2019). To fill this gap, this study gave attention to mediated mundane acts of connectedness in social media to illustrate that there are many stories of ‘care about’ omitted from previous narratives (Tironi and Rodríguez-Giralt, 2017).

From what we have learnt by looking at the ‘affects’ of social media use in everyday life, this chapter makes three suggestions. First, it advocates for the study of social connectedness (and its reverse in form of social isolation and loneliness) on social media as a matter of care (Andrews and Duff, 2019; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011) in socio-gerontechnology. As shown, the relationships among people, technologies, places and things, are key to the understanding of what possibilities social media entail, or in other words, what kind of social media use can foster or hinder affective human connections. Moreover, considering the difficulties of separating the medical from the social (Andrews and Duff, 2019), we think it is important to understand how these mediated doings of ‘care about’ are for the techno-care area of research. Second, it claims that the study of advancements in technology should include the study of emotions and affects to counterbalance the negative discourses, present in technology innovation discourses, that view ageing as a tech free, tech naïve, dependent and in crisis (Neven and Peine, 2017). There are possibilities (Latimer, 2018) of mediated ‘care about’ that go beyond both the passive care positions in the assistive technologies imaginaries and the active ageing described in the ageing society policy programs. Yet, it is important to pay attention at the forms of exclusion that might emerge from social media practices and that are not accounted in observations of adoption and literacy. They are related to forms of making words and normative views around how social media use should be. For instance, we

have seen how older people engages in affective practices that are contested, showing that the capacity of being affected or moved is relevant to certain forms of exclusion as well. Third, there is a need to increase the integration and application of what a relational study of social media use shows in technology design and social services provision. Investment in technological infrastructures needs to come hand in hand with investment in social infrastructures. It is problematic to assume that technologies can replace human contact, since as shown in the empirical part of the chapter, the technological is only a layer that doesn't get activated without the affective layer. The social organisation doesn't flow without the activation of the affective infrastructure. And only when these come together there might be a possibility for 'caring about' that is contingent to the situation. In other words, only through more complex and thoughtful design of technologies alongside with design of public social services, social connectedness and 'care about' could be supported by technology.

To conclude, innovative policy programmes and technology design should consider the social connectedness dimensions of technologies by expanding the idea of the user and focusing on the affective forces assembled in the practices to avoid turning technologies into a "fix" for the neoliberal agenda (Mort et al., 2013).



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