

# **“I Never Imagined Grandma Could Do So Well with Technology”: Evolving Roles of Younger Family Members in Older Adults' Technology Learning and Use**

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# Introduction



Older adults often **face challenges** in technology learning and use because of digital illiteracy, declines in physical and cognitive abilities, etc. [Pang et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2012]



**Younger family members** are one of the major support sources of older adults [Hunsaker et al., 2019; Portz et al., 2019]



Family support is often **challenging** because of difficulties in teaching, disagreements on technology use, etc. [Portz et al., 2019; Luijkx et al., 2015; Xie, 2007]

# Research Question

**Unpacking the family dynamics:** How do younger family members support older adults' technology learning **over the long term**?



# Method

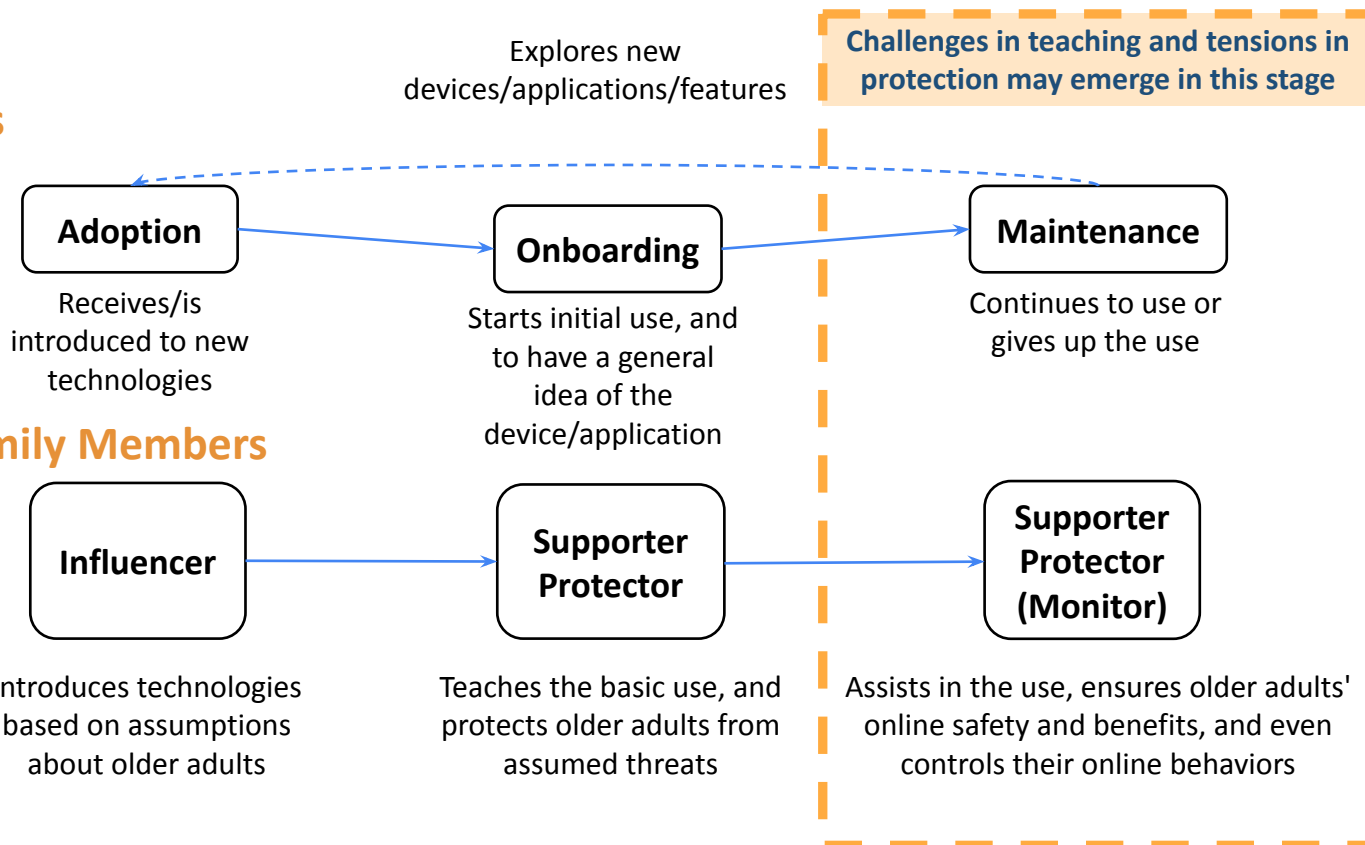
- one-on-one semi-structured interviews with **20 older adults** and **18 younger adults in China**, including **9 families**
- demographic information:
  - older adults: 12 female, Age 61-88 (Mean = 71.15);
  - younger adults: 11 female, Age 22-52 (Mean = 34.27)



# Family Support Pattern

## Older Adults

Older adults' technology learning stage



# Stage 1: Adoption

- introducing and teaching technology to older adults based on **assumptions about aging**

*“Older adults had better enjoy a simple life. The simpler, the better. Older adults can use smartphones for shopping and watching online videos, but **they don’t have to use phones with too advanced functions.**” (Y8)*



# Stage 2: Onboarding

- teaching in the context of **assumed difficulties**
- creating a **safety net** for older adults by simplifying the use and selecting applications for older adults carefully

*"It was much easier than I had anticipated when I first began teaching her... My grandmother is eager to learn, which was beyond my expectations, though it was still not as quick as I had hoped. I expected her to be unable to understand after one or two years, but she was able to use the smartphone after only two or three months." (Y12)*



***"Older adults don't have to know too much information; they don't need it. They can get what they need through trustworthy sources, like television, instead of reading online information." (Y8)***



## Stage 3: Maintenance

- teaching strategies need to **evolve** (because of older adults' forgetfulness and digital illiteracy)

*"My grandfather cannot understand what home button is, and **I need to work hard to explore a more childish way of teaching.**" (Y7)*



- impatience** in teaching

*"I will not ask my son for help... If I ask him again, he'll say something like, "Older adults don't have to learn [to use technology]; **[my teaching is meaningless because] you can't understand what I'm saying.**" (O7)*





## Stage 3: Maintenance

- younger adults would **adjust** their perceptions of older adults because many older adults are **far more active online than they assumed**
- **tensions** may result from their desires for protection; younger adults would regularly **check and even control** older adults' technology use

*"I was surprised to see that my father had Alipay on his phone. I guessed it might have been downloaded when he went to his bank, and I immediately made a complaint against the bank. How can they fudge older adults for profits? **I deleted Alipay and unbound his cards in WeChat Wallet.** My father doesn't have a full understanding of these services, and he often didn't know what he did in the application." (Y1)*



# “Xiao/XiaoShun” 孝/孝顺

- **Filial piety** as a cultural factor that can buffer burdens and tensions in family support, i.e., respect, obedience, and care towards older family members\*

***"I told myself this (the checking and controlling behavior of her daughter) is "xiaoshun" from my daughter. Actually, I have nothing to hide on my phone. If she can help me identify misconduct online, that would be beneficial." (O8)***



\* "xiaoshun" usually represents an authoritative hierarchical parent-child relationship, rather than an equal and reciprocal relationship centered around care between two individuals [Yeh and Bedford, 2003]

# Takeaways

- Let us treat older adults' technology learning as a **collaborative** activity.
- Older adults' technology learning is a **recurrent, dynamic, and evolving** process that needs long-term and stage-based care.
- We draw attention to **filial piety** as an important cultural context that shapes a unique family support pattern in China, which is different from the Western model emphasizing older adults' preference towards **independent learning** [Pang et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2012].

Thank you!

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