ABSTRACT: SILVER STORIES INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

"Closer Together": Using digital storytelling to chart how Melbourne's aging Irish community uses social media

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Abstract

"From the Great Famine, through to the mass departures of the 1950s and the 'lost' generation of the 1980s, modern Irish history has been marked by emigration. Yet in contrast to past mass departures, the availability of new media will ensure that the current generation will not be 'lost', when they can so easily be tagged, tweeted, and skyped. However, the enthusiasm for this "Generation Skype" has seen older Irish immigrants largely ignored. This paper will chart how Irish people who moved to Melbourne before the availability of digital technologies now make use of new media to connect with the Irish community in Australia and back in Ireland.

This paper is based on a larger research project that uses digital storytelling techniques to allow older people, who are often dismissed as falling on the other side of the digital divide, to reflect on their engagement with new media. Specifically, this paper will draw on surveys with over forty older Irish people in Melbourne and more than a dozen on-camera interviews. The many topics discussed by participants include: pre-digital communications practices, difficulties using new technologies, motivation for adopting social media, connection to Irish groups in Melbourne, and narrowing the distance between Ireland and Australia.

From these unique stories and experiences a picture of Melbourne's Irish community emerges, yet each across each account there is a desire to connect a community whose stories have all too often gone untold."

Keywords: New Media, Aging, Migration, Ireland, Digital Divide.

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