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MEANINGS ATTRIBUTED BY OLDER ADULTS TO COMPUTER USE

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This study explored the meanings older people in Australia attribute to computer use, an occupation less frequently associated with older age groups world-wide. In order to understand the meaning that older people attribute to this occupation, qualitative data was gathered from 9 people aged 65 years and over living in various locations across Australia. Two asynchronous online focus groups were conducted over 10 consecutive days. Data analysis was inductive and informed by interpretive phenomenology.

Five main themes connected to meaning emerged: feeling in control; an important part of daily life; keeping the brain active; relating to others; and personal gains from computer use. Computer use was found to provide opportunities for participants to maintain relationships, contribute to communities and to contest the societal expectations of ageing. The occupation also enabled some participants to remain socially engaged despite disability. Moreover, the findings indicated that the use of a computer was a socially valued and meaningful daily occupation for participants and that it contributed to their well being and sense of self.

This study holds relevance on a world platform as limited enquiries have focused on the role and meaning of computer use in the lives of older adults. This is despite technology having a valued presence in many nations and occupational therapists increasingly facing the challenge of enhancing the wellbeing and community participation of older clients through meaningful occupation. The findings encourage occupational therapists to consider computer use as a valued occupation with the potential to contribute positively to identity, sense of self, social connectedness and community participation of older adults.