



KOREAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION **RESEARCH PROJECT 2023**

By Hyewon Park

Background

Since 2008, Community Tech Network (CTN) has been working to close the digital divide by providing devices, digital literacy training, tech support, and internet access advice to digitally excluded communities.

Because research has shown that older adults and adults with disabilities are less likely to use the internet in their everyday lives without support from a trusted community partner, CTN works with computer labs, community-based organizations and nonprofit housing providers to answer learners' questions about their devices and the internet.

The Korean American Community Foundation of San Francisco (KACF-SF) is committed to building a connected and thriving community where all Korean Americans have the opportunity to live healthy and empowered lives.

KACF-SF invests in solutions that build bridges to success by providing grants to and building the capacity of nonprofit partners, including several Bay Area community centers serving Korean seniors.

When Hyewon Park joined CTN as a Korean/English bilingual technology instructor, CTN reached out to KACF to explore how we might serve the Korean community. CTN proposed a needs assessment for their community, conducted by Hyewon in Korean.

The Foundation agreed that a needs assessment would be a good idea; it had concerns about its community members' safety online, as well as concerns that the community might access and share misinformation on the internet. The Foundation was also looking to assess the digital skill level of their community in order to choose the best digital skills training and support interventions.

CTN designed a survey around KACF's concerns and a digital skills assessment which was distributed to the Korean American Senior Citizens League of Santa Clara (KASCL,) one of the communities supported by KACF. Hyewon conducted, facilitated and recorded interviews with both KACF-SF leadership and KASCL community members. To increase participation in the survey, Hyewon also offered a CTN workshop on using QR codes to the community to help people access an online version of the survey.

In addition to serving as CTN's Korean/English Bilingual Digital Literacy Instructor, Hyewon also has expertise in research with a Ph.D. in education.

Methodology

To assess Korean seniors' current digital skills and their learning needs, CTN first implemented Focus Group Interviews (FGI). FGIs explore and collect learners' perspectives regarding their learning and development needs. It involves conducting research under the guidance of an expert facilitator who leads open discussions among learners. FGIs are useful in obtaining a comprehensive range of opinions regarding learners' views on existing technology training situations, as well as in evaluating potential improvements and future training and development offerings.

The facilitator, Hyewon, initiated FGI discussions with Korean seniors to understand their current digital skills and learning needs. Prior to conducting the FGIs, Hyewon distributed a flyer outlining the purpose of the project to the members of the Korean senior center. She then reached out to individual seniors who expressed interest in participating. To ensure effective discussions, the FGI groups were divided into three smaller groups and the FGIs were conducted on May 1st, May 10th, and May 11th, 2023. A total of 27 seniors attended the FGIs, and each session lasted approximately 1.5-2 hours.

The primary focus of the discussions was to explore the seniors' daily use of digital devices, as well as the challenges and difficulties they encountered while utilizing digital technologies. Hyewon obtained consent from the participants to record the interviews, and all recorded content was transcribed. Subsequently, she analyzed the collected FGI data using initial, focused, and axial coding. Through focused coding, codes indicating the digital learning needs of Korean seniors were identified. These codes were then used to establish four final categories: 1) current status, 2) challenges and difficulties, 3) needs and interests, and 4) misinformation and fake news.

Using the insights gained from the FGI data analysis, Hyewon formulated survey questions. The survey primarily focused on current usage of digital devices and internet services, proficiency in using digital devices, used features on digital devices, challenges encountered while using them, desired digital skills for learning, preferred methods of digital learning, and concerns regarding misinformation and internet safety. The options provided in each survey question were based on the opinions expressed by the Korean seniors during the FGI discussions. For example, the option "Regular group meetings among senior community members" in the question about desired digital learning methods was inspired by the seniors' opinions shared during the FGIs.

Methodology

To facilitate the survey process effectively, Hyewon provided a workshop explaining the basic features of smartphones and introduced Quick Response (QR) codes containing links to the online survey. Among total 47 respondents, five seniors completed the online survey using the QR code and 42 seniors opted for paper surveys.



Timeline of the Project

	Date	Note
Outreach for FGI	April 27, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attending Annual Meeting at Korean Senior Center• Distributing FGI flyer and inviting the seniors for FGIs
FGI 1 st Round	May 1, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10:30 am – 12:30 pm• 10 seniors attended
FGI 2 nd Round	May 10, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11:00 am – 1:30 pm• 13 seniors attended
FGI 3 rd Round	May 11, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10:30 am – 11:30am• 4 seniors attended
Seminar and Survey	May 31, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10:30 am – 12:00 pm• Having a seminar about basic features of Smartphones and QR code (Survey)• 10 seniors attended
Collect Survey	June 6, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collecting total 47 surveys



Research Findings

1. The Digital Divide

- All the Korean seniors interviewed and surveyed possess their own digital devices, a 100% adoption rate.
- Among the Korean seniors, 85% pay the expense of their home internet services, while 9% rely on free internet services provided by their place of residence. In total, 91% of the Korean seniors surveyed and interviewed utilize internet services within their households.
- Even though all the participants have their own digital devices and home internet, their proficiency in utilizing these technologies remains notably limited. Survey findings indicate that 50% of the Korean seniors self-assess their digital competency as 'Beginner.'
- In practice, the predominant digital activities among the Korean seniors revolve around basic features such as 'Making and Receiving Calls,' 'Text Messaging,' 'Kakaotalk,' 'Email,' and 'YouTube.'
- This survey result reveals that the digital divide experienced by the Korean seniors stems not from issues of 'Access,' but rather from challenges related to 'Literacies and Competences.'
- Specifically, survey results highlight that the most significant challenges faced by the Korean seniors in utilizing digital devices is the 'Lack of knowledge regarding available device features and how to use them.'

Consequently, there is a significant need for the Korean seniors to engage in digital learning opportunities in order to enhance their digital literacy skills and competencies.

¹ Kakaotalk is one of the leading messaging apps in South Korea. As a free, multi-platform messaging app, it allows users to send text messages, make voice and video calls, share photos and videos, and send various multimedia content. KakaoTalk is available for smartphones and other digital devices (e.g., desktop, tablets) and is widely used in South Korea and other countries.

Research Findings

2. Desired Learning Method

- A significant majority (89.2%) of the survey and interview participants express a preference for in-person classes led by instructors as their preferred mode of digital learning.
- Intriguingly, 64.9% of the Korean seniors indicate they would like to have their own learning community for their digital learning. The learning method option, 'Regular Group Meetings among Senior Community Members,' was created from the result of the insights gathered during Focus Group Interviews (FGIs).
- Notably, the Korean seniors emphasize that their digital learning primarily takes place through informal conversations and observing others, rather than in formal classroom settings, as revealed during the FGIs.

(Excerpt from FGI data)

"Actually, we all learned how to use smartphones through trial and error, not by attending any specific classes."

"I just want to listen to conversations among different people to learn a bit."

"Sometimes I glance over to see what the person next to me is doing..."

- The Korean seniors attach great importance to their sense of 'Community' as a part of their identity. Within this community, they share a common language and possess a deeper understanding of each other's needs. Moreover, they show a strong desire to support and assist fellow community members. It is against this backdrop that they aspire to establish their own learning community for digital learning, with the intention of fostering a collaborative environment rather than solely relying on external support.

(Excerpt from FGI data)

Research Findings

“Right now, everyone has different opinions. We all have different things we want to know. So, I think it would be good if we start with what is most important for us as a group and learn step by step. Even if I personally don't need it, I would still like to learn and become familiar with it together, because we are a community. I hope we can follow along together like this.

“It would be great to have voluntary groups or communities like clubs where we can engage together. It would be beneficial because we can learn in Korean and have a better understanding of each other's needs.”

“If I feel like I've learned enough, I can now join as a teaching assistant in the beginner's class and help others together. That way, I can contribute and assist in this way. Don't you think it would be a good idea?”

- According to current studies (e.g. Friemel, 2016; Niehaves & Plattfaut, 2014), the availability of social support from peer-to-peer assistance and encouragement can compel seniors' active engagement with digital learning.

3. Misinformation and Internet Safety

- A significant percentage (64%) of the Korean seniors report that they receive news and new information through technologies such as Kakaotalk and text messages. Additionally, 57% of seniors say that they share the news and information that they acquire through technology with others.
- However, a concerning finding reveals that 58% of the seniors lack the ability to discern the truthfulness of news and information received via digital devices. Surprisingly, only 35% of the seniors have received guidance on identifying credible news and information through digital platforms.
- During FGIs, many participants expressed receiving numerous messages containing news and information from other seniors via Kakaotalk and text message. However, their typical response to these messages involves deleting or disregarding them due to their inability to handle them effectively.

Research Findings

- The survey results strongly indicate that while many Korean seniors actively share news and information through digital devices, they lack the necessary knowledge and opportunities to identify misinformation and fake news accurately.

These findings underscore the urgent need for Korean seniors to receive education and opportunities to learn effective strategies for identifying fake news and misinformation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Korean seniors who were interviewed and responded to the survey strongly prefer a peer-to-peer learning environment with trusted peers in their community. This type of support would be more sustainable and more empowering than learning from multiple instructors from other organizations. As the members of the community become resources for each other, they will gain confidence and independence.

Community Tech Network recommends that the Korean American Senior Citizens League of Santa Clara (KASCL) enroll members in a Digital Navigator training program that is facilitated by Hyewon or another Korean instructor. The training should be accompanied with training materials and other resources that are appropriate for teaching older Koreans. It is important that the Digital Navigators have access to materials and resources that are in Korean language and culturally appropriate for their community.

