



The Endless End

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Investigating Cooking and Heating Product Needs for Irish Older Adults

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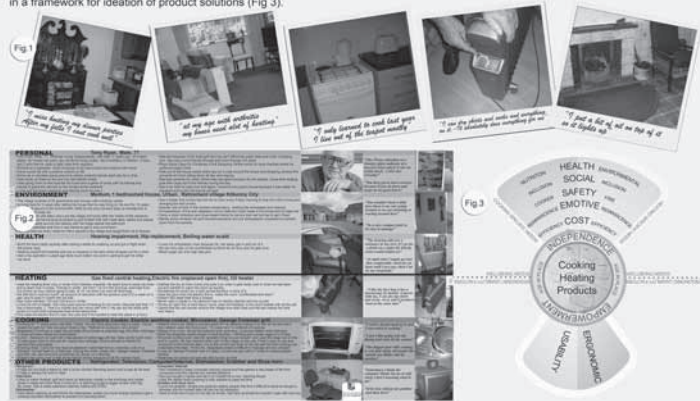
Name: Mr. P.J. White
Title and Position: PhD Researcher in Product Design
Institution: Department of Design and Innovation, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Co Kildare, Republic of Ireland
Email: pj.white@nuim.ie

Objectives

The world's population is ageing; researchers have an increasingly important role to play in innovating new products, appliances and services to allow for better everyday living conditions of this ageing demographic. Health, wellbeing and age in place needs are of particular importance in Ireland as research has revealed that as a nation we are living longer in ill health (McGill, 2009). The most fundamental domestic products to health, wellbeing and in the promotion of ageing in place are cooking and heating products, however little design research has been carried out in this area. In this study it is intended to acquire a deep understanding of the Irish older adult culture in relation to these products, defining needs and discovering holistic factors that these products embody. From this understanding prototypes will be created and user tested by older adults to determine appropriate design criteria.

Methodology

To inquire into the context of usability in cooking and heating products, research has been conducted using ethnographic methods within the homes of participant older adults. This involved a yearlong (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) study with forty participants over the age of 70 years across Ireland and from various socio-economic groups (Fig 1.) Through qualitative open coding, seven representative personae have been developed. These personae were refined, visualised and communicated through person centric displays (Fig. 2). Analysis and interpretation of personae data through memoing (Glaser, 1998) resulted in a framework for ideation of product solutions (Fig 3).



Current Outcomes

Insights from this framework are deep, far reaching and summarises the specific product needs for older adults. These include wellbeing needs such as Health, Social, Safety, Emotive and Cost factors as well as ergonomic and usability factors. The details of these factors designed into cooking and heating products is intended to create empowerment, independence and promote ageing in place. From a cooking perspective insights range from the struggles of older men learning to cook for the first time through to social exclusion and malnutrition/obesity due to the inability to provide meals for themselves and others. From a heating perspective, insights include how older adults utilise heating products to alleviate pain associated with arthritis and poor circulation. Heating products that tackle social and economical issues in Ireland such as fuel poverty and spatial shrink (McAvoy, 2007) also need to be designed. It was seen that older adults suffering with poor mobility or financial pressures are finding difficulty in paying for the heating of their entire home. As a result of this, a proportion of this demographic are living in a small area of their house, leaving the remaining house in disrepair and open to health hazards through damp and deterioration.

It is now intended to develop iterative prototypes for user testing. These products have been categorised into the following areas: 1. Space Heating devices, 2. Fireplace/Stove appliances, 3. Hobs and Ovens 4. Cooking and heating controls

References

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P.J. White

Department of Design and Innovation, National University of Ireland Maynooth,
 Co Kildare, Republic of Ireland
 pj.white@nuim.ie