

Bridging the digital divide: age-friendly apps

跨越數字鴻溝 齡活應用程式



In the digital era, many of the elderly find it hard to keep up with digital technologies and become victims of the "digital divide." **Prof Cheng SHI**, Research Assistant Professor of Lingnan's **School of Graduate Studies** and the **Institute of Policy Studies**, has been focusing on these issues for senior citizens throughout her career. In 2024, she began to research "**Digital Bridge or Digital Barrier? A Study on Older People's Acceptance and Resistance of "Senior Mode" in Apps**", planning to bridge this gap, and help seniors integrate into the digital society.

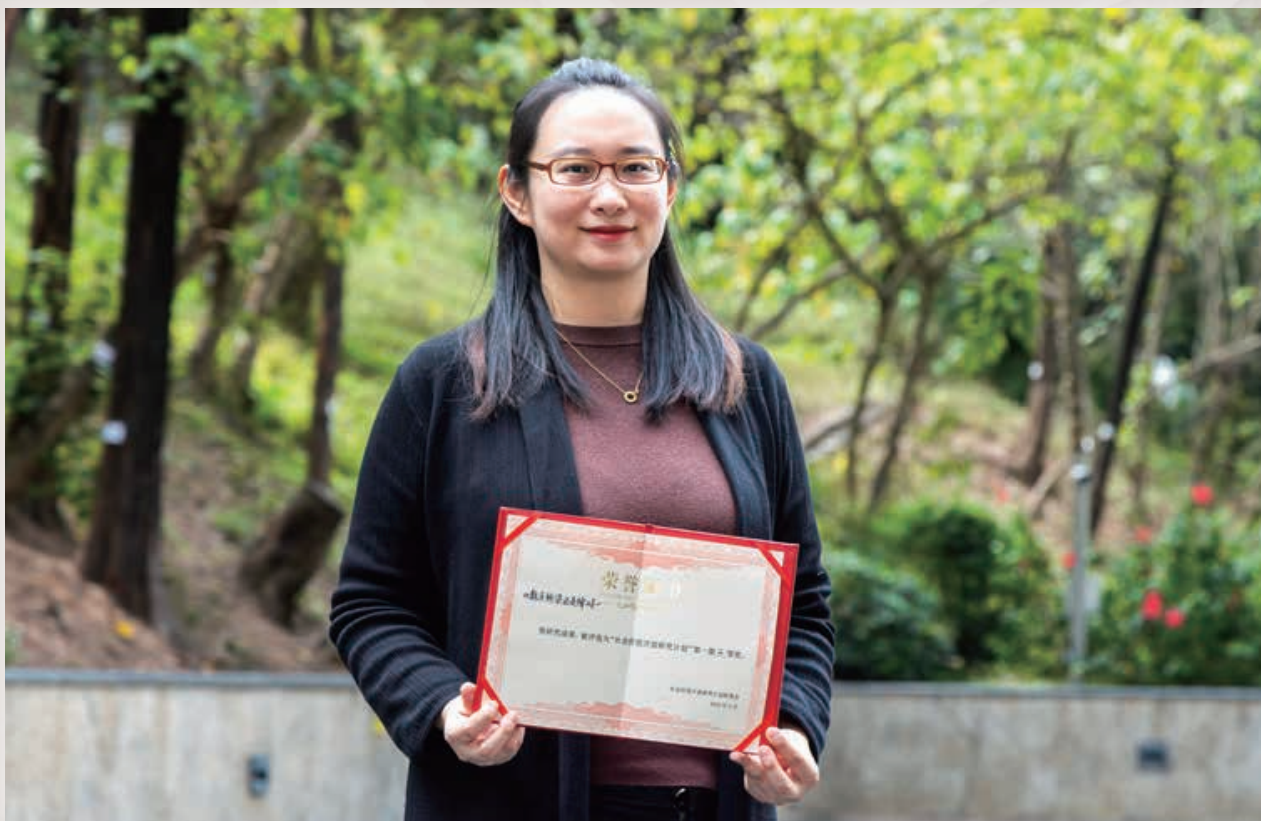
The project recently won **second prize in the first phase of the Social Value Open Research Program**, one of 12 out of 25 award-winning projects. Run by Tencent SSV (Tencent Sustainable Social Value), Cultural China and the Tencent Research Institute, the program encourages researchers to learn about social concerns from small issues to provide future references for companies to solve these problems through technology by working with universities.

At the outset of her award-winning project, she interviewed an older group of users to find out how the senior mode of the three most used apps, WeChat, Taobao and TikTok, helps them, and their experiences of using this mode. She found that most of them did not even use the senior mode, feeling that learning the mode itself was an obstacle, and also that was too simplistic as many functions are removed, or the font size simply enlarged.

在數字時代，對於很多長者來說，數碼化的生活模式，往往卻教他們難以適應，墮進「數字鴻溝」。一直關注老年人議題的嶺南大學**研究生院兼政策研究院**研究助理教授**石琿**，於去年展開了「**數字橋樑還是障礙？老年人對APP“老年人模式”的接受與排斥研究**」，思考怎樣解決老年人數字鴻溝的問題和如何幫助他們更好的融入數碼化社會。

這研究項目去年先獲得由騰訊 SSV（騰訊可持續社會價值）、文化縱橫、騰訊研究院聯合發起的**社會價值開放研究計劃第一期**挑選，成為 25 項參與計劃的研究項目之一。計劃鼓勵研究人員從小切口洞悉社會問題，連接學界與企業，為企業提供寶貴的參考，以科技解決這些社會問題。石教授的研究項目最近更獲頒**二等獎**，以肯定她的研究成果。

這獲獎研究則由觀察長者最常用的三個 APP，包括微信、淘寶和抖音著手，瞭解其老年人或關愛模式能幫助長者解決什麼問題、長者對這模式的回應。研究發現大部分長者並沒有使用老年模式，覺得學習這模式本身就是一個障礙，其次是覺得老年模式太單一，因為很多原本的功能被簡化、甚或只是字體被放大。



Simplifying some of the functions is actually another form of exclusion for the elderly, as some functions they want to use are gone. Once they choose the senior mode, they are isolated. To some extent, that doesn't help them integrate into the digital society but rather exacerbates their exclusion.

這些應用程式簡化了功能，其實對老年人來說是另外一種排斥，因為想用的一些功能就沒了。老年人一旦選擇了老年模式，反而陷入了一種自我隔離。這樣在某種程度上來說，老年人模式並沒有幫助他們融入數字社會，反而加劇了排斥的情況。



The research suggests app development companies design functions that better meet the needs of the elderly and improve user experience through in-depth surveys. At the same time, support from society, family, and their local community may help to facilitate and motivate older people to learn and use these apps, and better integrate better into the digital society.

In 2025, Prof Shi was the only scholar chosen from a Hong Kong university to be appointed as a member of the **Expert Group of Long-term Care Insurance under China National Healthcare Security Administration**. Looking ahead, Prof Shi will focus on three research topics — retirement planning, long-term care, and dementia, and study how to link policies, families, and the older people to achieve a more harmonious society.

研究建議開發相關科技公司可透過深入需求調查，設計更符合老年人需求的功能，提高用戶體驗的設計。同時，來自社會、家庭和社區的支持亦可引導和誘發長者學習及使用這些 APP，幫助長者更好的融入這數碼化社會。

石教授更於 2025 年被選為**首批國家醫療保障局國家長期護理保險專家庫諮詢專家**，為香港大專院校唯一入選的學者，未來將有機會參與及討論有關方面的諮詢工作。未來，石教授希望在退休規劃、長期護理和認知障礙症這三個議題當中，研究社會政策、家庭和老年人三者之間怎樣可以形成一個更好的互動關係，最終達致一個更和諧的社會。■