A rapidly ageing population in Australia would benefit from community-based social marketing (CBSM) initiatives that promote active ageing. In particular, participation-based CBSM initiatives for older Australians that make visible the positive behaviours that comprise active ageing serve to generate desired social norms and attend to social loneliness and its many negative consequences (see Tilvis et al., 2012). CBSM has successfully addressed various behaviours (see Lynes, Whitney and Murray, 2014; Schuster, Kubacki and Rundle-Thiele, 2016), overcoming resistance and other barriers typical of behaviour change (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, 1999).

With a growing number of older Australians using social media (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), digitally enabled participation in digital villages represents a potential CBSM initiative that may be advantageous to individuals and society. Beyond existing social networking, a CBSM initiative that creates an opportunity for the larger community to seek out, showcase and engage the skills and capabilities of older people will assist in changing the beliefs and attitudes about ageing among the younger population, potentially stimulating intergenerational change with regards to active ageing. Ultimately, the potential for such an initiative to contribute to the larger government societal well-being agenda of ‘community capacity building’ — whereby skills and abilities of older people are recognised, valued and sought after (Findsen, 2006; Lovell, Kearns and Rosenberg, 2011) — is apparent. The purpose of this discussion paper is to conceptualise such a CBSM active ageing digital village intergenerational nexus and pose research questions for social marketers.

Active Ageing

Active ageing is defined by the World Health Organisation as the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age (World Health Organisation, 2002). Rather than denoting physical activity and the probability of disease and disability, the term ‘active’ is used to denote an ability to contribute and join in
social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic activities — that is, an active engagement with life (Rowe and Kahn, 1997; World Health Organisation, 2002).

Older Australians view participation as central to active ageing. Buys and Miller (2006) found that participation among older Australians took a number of forms including social interactions, involvement in activities, giving back, personal development and work. Nonetheless, active ageing programs often focus on mental and physical health and, thus, are not holistic and at odds with the point of view of older Australians. Ergo, this gap suggests that there is an opportunity to enable older Australians to participate in the community at a higher level, in more substantial ways and to challenge the deficit perspective of what it means to become older.

Older persons are aware that they are often visualised as inert and inactive in the community and they themselves recognise this state is an undesirable one (Tilvis et al., 2012). It has been established that a lack of social connections is an important predictor of social isolation, social inactivity and early mortality (Tilvis et al., 2012). In Australia, loneliness is a large problem as 50% of people over 61 experience loneliness, 26% to 29% are chronically lonely with men experiencing more extreme forms of loneliness (Franklin and Tranter, 2008). Loneliness is associated with higher stress ratings, an increased risk of heart attacks and cardiac deaths (Hawkley et al., 2003), depression (Cacioppo et al., 2006), reduced physical activity (Hawkley, Thisted and Cacioppo, 2009) and acts as a risk factor for increased morbidity and mortality (Hawkley et al., 2003). Depression alone results in up to a 50% increase in general medical expenses (Druss, Rohrbaugh and Rosenheck, 1999) with the lonely reporting their health as twice as bad as those who are not lonely (Easton, 2011).

Successful interventions for decreasing social isolation include the use of teleconferencing, support groups, service provision and internet...
usage (Findlay, 2003). Older people form a fast-growing group of computer and internet users (Findlay, 2003) suggesting that digital initiatives may be appropriate. Indeed, the digital initiative itself may be advantageous to participants by enhancing their cognitive functions (Myhre, Mehl and Glisky, 2016). While it is acknowledged that some gaps and barriers remain regarding digital adoption among all older persons (see Friemel, 2016), the potential remains for a CBSM initiative that promotes active ageing social connectivity via a digital village in which participant led connections are made among older people, between older people and younger people and, importantly, a resource for the community at large.

Digital Villages

The notions ‘community’ and ‘village’ are difficult to define. Many definitions exist including the view that a community and village may be a social network of people with shared experiences, interests, tastes and values who may or may not reside in geographically diverse locations (Piselli, 2007; Fetterman, 2012). In this instance, a digital village is conceptualised as a social, digitally enabled community that provides access to tools, digital infrastructure and support. In such an environment, it should be possible for older people to learn, observe and participate with fewer barriers. It is known that digital interaction benefits those who are socially isolated in many ways, including longevity (e.g., Umberson et al., 2010; Sheldon et al., 2011; Chang, McAllister and McCaslin, 2014) particularly when meaningful relationships are formed (Easton, 2011). In Australia, 86% of households have internet access with most accessing the internet via a desktop or laptop computer (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Around 51% of people 65 years or older were internet users currently online for an average of seven hours per week for banking (50%) and social networking (43%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). These statistics suggest that the notion of a participant led digital village is not unreasonable.

Research Questions for Social Marketers

Key research questions for social marketers include:

- What is the value proposition for a) digitally enabled and b) non-digitally enabled older people participating in a digital village?
- How can a participation-based CBSM active ageing digital village initiative make visible the positive behaviours to a) non-digitally enabled participants; and b) the larger community so they seek out, showcase and engage the skills and capabilities of older people.
ACTIVE AGING VIA DIGITAL VILLAGES

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