

DIGITAL LITERACY

Improved digital literacy starts with building confidence in tech skills — particularly among the 70-plus

A 2021 Tech Study reports on the digital literacy of the 50-plus audience



Those ages 50-plus have technology ownership and usage levels close to that of the 18-49 year olds. While older adults are hesitant to call themselves "tech-savvy," the majority (63%) are confident in their use of technology, whether that be a computer, smartphone, or tablet. But are they digitally literate? In the broadest sense, digital literacy means having the skills you need to live, learn, and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly through digital technologies like internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices.

The 50-plus have moderate digital literacy

While the 50-plus are comfortable with technology more now than ever, there is still room to grow. They are aware there is more to learn and leverage, as more than half indicate a desire to have a better grasp of today's technology. What might be most surprising to some, is the age group with the greatest appetite for learning more are the 70-plus, with almost half of this age segment (46%) saying they would use technology more in their daily lives if they knew how, compared to 36% and 37% among 50-59 and 60-69 year olds who say the same. But this is also the segment that feels the most uncertain about their technical prowess and may be hardest to reach with traditional education methods.

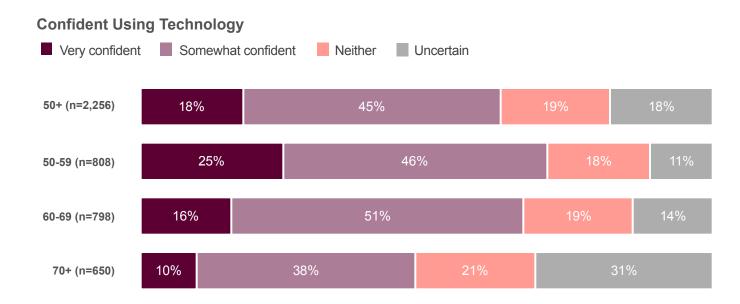


54% of those 50-plus wish they had a better grasp on technology so they could more frequently and easily connect with others



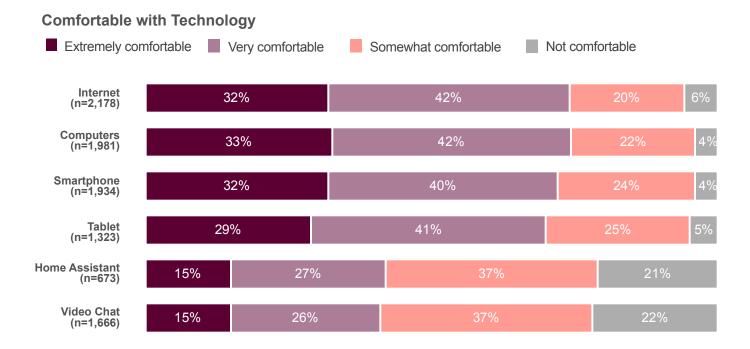
Comfort and confidence are not the same when it comes to older adults and technology

The 50-plus are very realistic with where they are at with technology. The majority wait to adopt new technology once it becomes mainstream (64%), with just one in ten (10%) considering themselves early adopters, among the first to try it. When they do adopt it, they are generally sure about their abilities and express confidence in the technology they are currently using (63%), though this confidence decreases as age increases. While one in ten (11%) age 50-59 feel uncertain about their use of technology, about one in three (31%) age 70+ feel uncertain.





When evaluating their comfort level using various technology devices, most are comfortable with standard devices such as the internet, computers, and smartphones, but comfort soften significantly when it comes to the use of newer technology like home assistants and video chat.

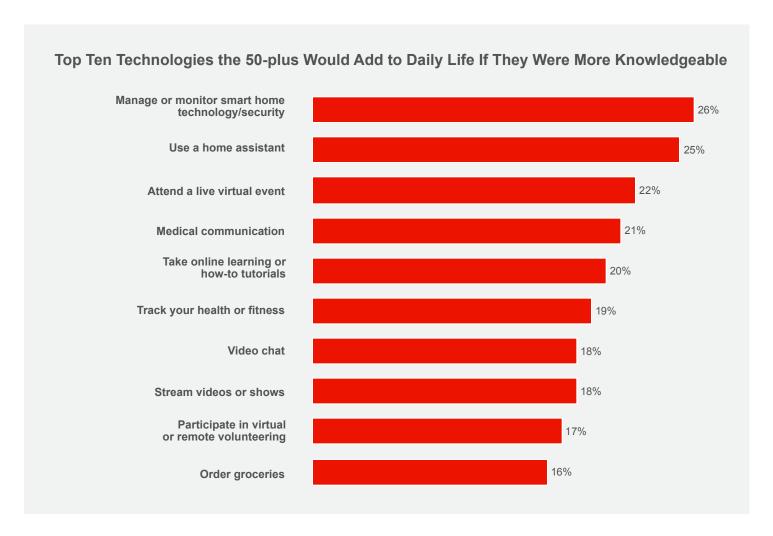


Despite their stated confidence and comfort levels, only 30% consider themselves to be "tech-savvy." In other words, while they are comfortable with what they know and use thus far, the majority of the 50-plus would only consider themselves to be moderately digitally literate. The good news is they are far from complacent about their relationship with technology.

The 50-plus are hungry to strengthen their digital literacy skills

Among adults ages 50-plus, 39% say they would use technology more in their daily life if they knew how. This statistic jumps up to 68% among those who are uncertain about their technology abilities compared to 31% among those who are confident. In addition, among this same 18% who are uncertain, 78% wish they had a better grasp of today's technology. Meaning, there is a unique segment of the 50-plus audience very aware there is more to learn and leverage when it comes to technology.

The technology the 50-plus would like to add to their daily life if they had the knowledge and comfort with include smart home security, home assistants, participation in virtual events, and new ways to use their smartphone (e.g. video chat).



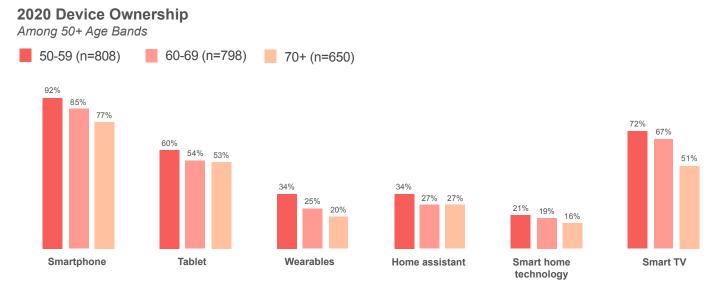
The top ten list does not dramatically alter when evaluating those who are confident versus those who are uncertain about their technology capabilities with exception of video chat. Those who are uncertain about their technology skills are far more interested in learning about video chat with medical professionals (29%) and family (28%) than are those who are already confident in their abilities (16% and 14%, respectively).

Even when there is a desire to learn, some hesitations may exist due to poor experiences with technology. One in four or 24% of the 50-plus report having had a bad experience with technology. This rate is consistent across all ages. And more specifically, among those uncertain about their abilities, 55% say learning about technology feels like a burden. Knowing that the majority of this 'uncertain' group (52%) is comprised of those 70-plus, it is important to better understand this specific age cohort and their needs.



The 70-plus are interested in improving very specific technology skills

Device ownership among the 70-plus is not drastically different than younger adults between the ages of 50-69. However, their confidence in using such technology is significantly lower.



Which is likely why the 70-plus age cohort express the most interest in learning about today's technology.

Percent Who Wish They Had A Better Grasp On Technology

50% (n=808)

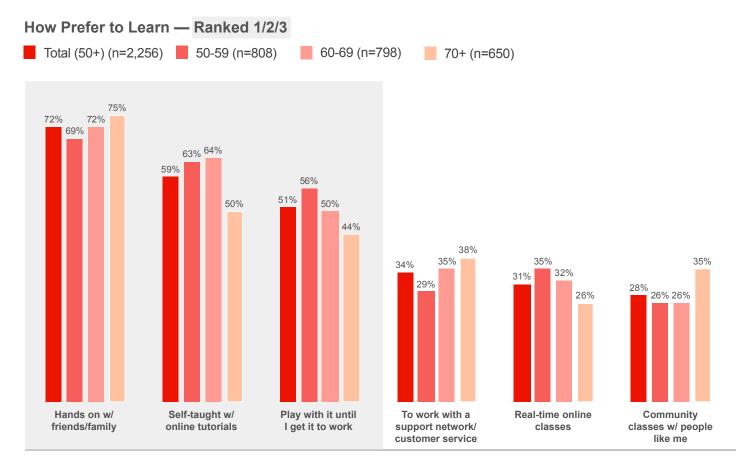
(n=798)

(n=650)



The aspects of technology this cohort is most interested in learning more about mirrors that of the 50-plus audience, covering such things as smart home security, home assistants, and participating in virtual events. However, those aspects of technology that are of specific interest to the 70-plus, but not to those younger, include how to get health and fitness information (15%), getting directions (14%), watching 'How-To' tutorials (14%), downloading or purchasing an app (12%), and sending or receiving instant messages, text messages, or emails (4%).

So the question is, how to provide digital literacy education to the 70-plus? The majority of those 70-plus (75%) prefer to learn about new technology through friends and family, while 35% are open to "community classes for people like me." Therefore, creative, possibly edutainment type programs, may need to be developed to reach this segment of the population.





Implications

When it comes to improving digital literacy, there are two unique and not mutually exclusive segments of the 50-plus audience that should be the focus - the 70-plus and those who are uncertain about their technology abilities. These segments need help to not only get comfortable with new technology but to also learn how to leverage the technology they already have to its full potential. Perhaps focusing on a few key advancements in technology at a time can bring these segments up to speed and feeling more capable and confident. The 50plus audience is not complacent, to the contrary, they are hungry and eager to learn more. The challenge lies in finding a way to reach them that works best for them.



For more information on the survey and methodology please contact: Brittne Kakulla, bkakulla@aarp.org

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