TOPICAL SPOTLIGHT

**BARRIERS AND
DIGITAL INEQUITIES****Tech Barriers –
Tactical and Emotional**

A 2021 Tech Study uncovers barriers to greater tech adoption among the 50+

It could be said that there has never been a time when we relied so heavily on technology to maintain a sense of social connection as we did in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic left most of us isolated in our own homes with only phone calls, video chat, and social media as means to connecting with loved ones. But even given our recent reliance on technology, some barriers to full technology adoption still exist among adults 50+.

On the tangible side of things, while the majority of the 50+ enjoy high-speed access to the internet, that reality can change based on where you live and/or your income. And, when you dig down into the details, a more intangible factor holding many 50+ back from adopting some of the new technology aimed at making their lives easier (e.g. smart home technology, home assistants) or to help them stay connected to friends and family (e.g. video chat, social media) – is a lack of knowledge. Education, patience, and confidence are all needed to help this audience take full advantage of what technology has to offer.

Not everyone has easy access to a high-speed internet connection

More than 38 million Americans 50+ lack high speed internet at home.¹ Therefore, it's not surprising that the survey findings show while three-fourths (76%) of adults 50+ access the internet through a high-speed connection (cable, fiber, or DSL) the remaining do not.¹ The one-fourth that remain use satellite or fixed wireless (8%), their cellular service (5%), are not sure how they connect (7%) or have no connection at all (4%).

Two in five (40%) say access to high-speed internet is a problem in their local community- and 11% indicate that it is a major problem. Problems accessing high-speed internet do not change based on one's income, however, it does change based on where one lives.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey (ACS), 2019 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS).

Those who live in rural areas are significantly more likely than those in an urban or suburban setting to say access to high-speed internet is a major problem for their local community (23% vs. 9% and 5%, respectively).

How problematic community access to internet is — By residential location

Major problem Minor problem Not a problem Don't Know

As a result, those in rural areas report lower levels of cable or fiber high-speed connections and higher levels of DSL or satellite or fixed wireless as their means to connecting to the internet.

Type of internet connection

While access is a barrier to connecting to the internet so is the cost of the service. 41% of those 50+ indicate access is a major or minor problem for their local community, and 60% say the cost of high-speed internet is an issue for them personally. While problems with high-speed internet access differ by residential location, problems with cost do not – they differ by income.

The cost of high-speed internet is a deterrent for some

Those who earn less than \$40k per year are twice as likely than those earning \$75k+ to say the cost of monthly high-speed internet is a major problem for them personally; 29% vs. 15%, respectively. In fact, 8% of those earning less than \$40k report not having a home internet connection, compared to less than 1% among those earning \$75k+ a year.

How problematic cost of internet is personally

Among adults 50-plus, by income

■ Major problem ■ Minor problem ■ Not a problem ■ Don't Know

On average, those 50+ spend \$67 a month for their home internet service. This cost, combined with other technology spends (e.g. cell service, cable/TV, streaming services), account for approximately 16% of the household budget.

While those earning less than \$40k spend less on high-speed internet costs compared to those making 75k or more (less than 40k: \$58, 40-75k: \$69, \$75k+: \$76), those in rural areas spend about the same amount a month on high-speed internet as those in urban or suburban areas (rural: \$65, urban: \$63, suburban: \$71).

But beyond the tangibles of access and cost, there is another culprit underneath the surface that holds the 50+ back from fully adopting today's technology – lack of knowledge

According to the 50+, cost, lack of knowledge, and privacy concerns are the top reasons for not adopting new technology that can help them engage with friends and family. When you consider all of the additional reasons that are barriers to technology adoption; unknown benefits, unknown user experience, unknown installation process – there is a significant amount of hesitation due to lack of knowledge. This experience does not differ by residential location or income; it is a universal truth for the 50+.

Lack of knowledge as a barrier to adopting tech increases with age; 19% among 18-49, 33% among 50-64, 40% among 65+

Barriers to adopting new technology

Percent ranking problem 1st, 2nd, or 3rd

And to drive this point home further, when adults 50+ were asked to share what, if anything, was their biggest frustration with technology today, once again, lack of knowledge (NET) came up first. In comparison, cost was mentioned by 6% and access by 4%.

Biggest frustration with technology today

“Not knowing how to use it. Who can teach me. Also, everything changes so quick.”

“Not understanding how it applies to my everyday life.”

“My biggest frustration with technology is just learning how to use it. I see my 25 and 30-year-old daughters that are so knowledgeable and can get to any site and use the tools to help them and I find it harder to do that.”

“How it can benefit me and how to use it with confidence.”

“Wondering how safe my private information is.”

“If something's expensive, the value proposition is unclear, and it's hard to get started and use, then my interest drops rapidly.”

Technology Frustrations

Using this data combined with additional resources, AARP has identified five unique knowledge barriers impacting tech adoption among older adults. Knowing what these barriers are can help the industry better understand this audience and what they may need that is different than the 18-49 consumer.

Five Key Knowledge Barriers to Tech Adoption

DESIGN & USER INTERFACE EXPERIENCE

Is it easy to use?
Was it designed for
people like me?
Did they do testing with
people like me?

AWARENESS & INTEREST

Why should I be
interested in this
technology?
What new
products exist?
Should I care?

COST & ACQUISITION

Can I afford it?
How do I buy it?
How do I select the
right product?

INSTALLATION & ADOPTION

How do I integrate it
into my life?
Who can help me if
I run into problems?
How difficult is it to
set up?

TRUST & PRIVACY

Is my personal data
secure?
Any known privacy or
identify theft issues?
What personal data
does it collect?

While access or high costs are an issue for some, knowledge barriers cannot be overlooked as a major barrier for tech adoption among the 50+. All of these barriers need to be addressed. In doing so, this audience could become more informed, educated, and confident, allowing them to not only learn how to use technology better, but to better understand how it could benefit them. Because when it comes down to it, technology has a very clear value proposition it has to live up to for those 50+ - 'is it useful to me, is it enjoyable, and is it worth my time, money, and effort?'

For more information on the survey and methodology please contact:

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