TOPICAL SPOTLIGHT DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT

How The 50-Plus Have Embraced Digital Entertainment

An AARP study reports on the growth in the use of technology to entertain the 50-plus audience

Digital entertainment is most broadly referred to as any type of entertainment (movies, music, art, comedy, etc.) that is consumed through, or with the help of, technology. This includes but is not limited to computers, laptops, smartphones, cellular service, Smart TVs, streaming services, social media platforms, and of course, the internet.

During more than a year of restricted social outings and events, it is not surprising many people turned to digital options for their entertainment needs. The 50-plus are no exception, reporting year over year growth in several aspects of digital entertainment - increased ownership and use of Smart TVs, increased use of audio and visual entertainment apps like music, streaming services, and podcasts, and increased engagement in socially driven activities such as live streams and virtual events.

Research suggests some of these new entertainment trends are not likely to subside once the pandemic is fully behind us. Instead, this downtime has awakened the imagination and creativity of the 50-plus, as they engage more and more with the many digital entertainment options available today.

71% age group
50-59

59% 60-69

46% 70+

Stream their entertainment primarily through their TV; shows, movies, series, and/or videos

The shift to streaming entertainment is significant

While many new trends emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the shift to streaming entertainment in the home is one of the most evident. Though all the chatter of “What are you watching on Netflix tonight?” could be seen as anecdotal, the data confirms the shift is real.

50-plus Smart TV Ownership

For starters, ownership of Smart TV's saw double digit growth among the 50-plus, up from 49% in 2019 to 64% in 2020. In addition, the 50-plus report a dramatic shift in how they consume entertainment in the home. In 2019, 58% said they primarily watched TV shows and movies through their network/cable connection. By 2020, that number decreased to 38%. Meaning, over 60% of the 50-plus actively stream entertainment via their TV.

And it's not just occasionally, 58% claim to stream TV shows, movies, series, or videos weekly or more often. Knowing this, it is not surprising that two out of the top three technology purchases made by the 50-plus in the last year are entertainment focused, with 23% of this audience buying a Smart TV and 22% buying Bluetooth headsets/earbuds.

Frequency of Streaming for the 50-plus (n=2,249)

As for the streaming services used, while there are a variety available today, the four primary services used among the 50-plus are Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Disney+.

Streaming Services Used

	50+ (n=1,833)	50-59 (n=716)	60-69 (n=645)	70+ (n=472)
NETFLIX	67%	73%	65%	61%
amazon prime video	55%	55%	61%	49%
hulu	29%	36%	31%	18%
Disney+	21%	28%	20%	13%

On average, the 50-plus subscribe to 2.6 different streaming services but that varies based on the composition of the household. Those with kids in the household average 3.24 services compared to 2.51 among those without kids. And those with kids are significantly more likely to subscribe to Disney+ (47%) compared to those without kids (18%). Interestingly though, those who subscribe to Hulu are more likely to stream on a daily basis (52%) compared to those watching Netflix (40%), Amazon Prime (42%), or Disney+ (44%).

Mobile devices and apps are also used for digital entertainment

While Smart TVs are the primary device for streaming entertainment, they are not the only device. In fact, 22% of the 50-plus stream on their smartphone and 32% stream on their tablet. The 50-59 are significantly more likely to stream entertainment via their smartphone than those older. That said, the 70-plus do in fact stream from a mobile device, but prefer to do so on their tablet, as cited by 25% of this audience.

There has also been a significant increase in the weekly use of specific apps related to digital entertainment with year over year growth in music, streaming, and podcast apps.

Similar to streaming via the TV, the household composition can influence the degree of streaming via an app as well. Those with one (18%) or two (19%) people in the household indicate lower levels of streaming videos or movies via an app compared to those with three or more people in the household (30%); perhaps catching a little “me time” whenever, wherever they can.

Online social interactions become a source of digital entertainment

Speaking of “me time,” social media may be seen as a source of news for some, but for most it is simply a source of general information and entertainment, especially in the past year when the population yearned for a sense of connection. To that point, the majority (79%) of the 50-plus engaged in social media last year, with 66% accessing it from their mobile device weekly. That is up from 58% saying the same a year ago. Even TikTok is beginning to get some traction among this audience.

Social Media Sites Used to Connect with Friends and Family

■ 50+ (n=1,786)

The 50-plus also increased their engagement with live stream events on their social media platforms, up from 27% in 2019 to 42% in 2020 engaging in such activity in a three-month period. And in the face of lockdowns and restrictions, 32% of those 50-plus report participating in a virtual event, which was a first for many. Live virtual events appealed significantly more to females than males with 38% of females giving it a go during COVID-19 compared to 25% of males.

Attended Live Virtual Event — Since COVID onset

50-59 (n=749)	60-69 (n=738)	70+ (n=579)
33%	34%	28%

Regardless of gender, 63% of those who engaged in a virtual event in the past indicate an intent to continue to do so once all COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. What attracts this audience to engage in a live virtual event is the type of event, cost, host, and day/time.

Top Factors in Virtual Event Attendance Decision Among the 50-plus (n=728)

67%
Event Type

58%
Cost

56%
Event Host

55%
Day/Time
of the Event

32%
Who else
Is attending

27%
Event
Platform

Implications

It is hard to predict when the pandemic will no longer threaten our livelihood or how the entertainment consumption habits of the 50-plus might change in time. However, it seems rather apparent, these newfound sources of entertainment, through the use and help of technology, will only likely expand over time. Therefore, it will be important for content creators to continue to develop programming that is most attractive to this audience, as their appetite for digital entertainment does not appear to be fading – lockdown or not.

For more information on the survey and methodology please contact:
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