African American SPOTLIGHT

Incorporating more technology

Removing barriers to let
technology work for them

African Americans 50-plus may initially shy away from newer technologies, like home assistants and smart home tech, but once owned, they are used frequently. To increase adoption, this population may simply need help understanding how their privacy is protected when using such devices. In many cases, use rates among African Americans are already higher than 2019 due to COVID-19 and some may want to explore how technology can help them manage costs and convenience.

Even when ownership is low, usership is high

While a majority of African Americans 50-plus own smartphones (78%), laptops (66%), and tablets (51%), they are not the most frequently used tech devices. Aside from smartphones (97%), three-quarters or more use their smart home tech (80%) and wearable device (74%), every day. Those who own non-smartphones use their regular cell phone (74%) every day as well. This level of use may only be due to COVID-19, as many people have found more time on their hands and a greater need to digitally connect with those outside one's quarantine bubble. During this time, some report increased rates of texting (45%), video chatting (38%), and talking on the phone (41%) and a majority (58%) report feeling more positive about technology now than before COVID-19.

**A new study examines
how African Americans
50-plus use technology**

Two-thirds (69%) feel confident in their use of technology, particularly the internet (64%), computers (62%), smartphones (61%), and tablets (54%), but these comfort levels wane when using newer technologies, like video chat (39%) and home assistants (25%).

Technology ownership and use among African Americans 50-plus

Owns Uses daily

Texting tops smartphone use (91%) but over half (59%) use their phone for gaming

91%

Smartphone use

59%

Gaming use

Top smartphone uses among African Americans 50-plus

COVID-19 likely caused a permanent increase in technology use

During COVID-19, a plurality of African Americans report texting (45%), video chatting (38%), and attending live virtual events (30%) more than before quarantine. Among those who know about them, roughly two in five (44%) African Americans have participated in live virtual events. Frequency of phone call conversations (52%), email (49%) and letter (36%) exchanges remained largely the same. However, once the pandemic is over and restrictions are lifted, many African Americans plan on reducing the amount they virtually volunteer (50%), or attend live virtual events (41%), though a majority say they will text (76%), make phone calls (75%), email (75%), exchange letters (66%), and video chat (55%) the same amount.

Change in use during COVID-19 stay-in-place

Reluctant adopters

In the past 12 months, African Americans' 50-plus spent an average of \$1,446 on tech devices, most often a smartphone (38%), Smart TV (36%), and Bluetooth headset/ear buds (34%). Notably, the likelihood to purchase “newer” technologies like smart home technology and home assistants are much lower, perhaps a sign of their reluctance to use such technologies until it has been around longer.

While many used existing technology in their daily lives during the pandemic lockdowns, when it comes to incorporating new technology into their lives, few consider themselves early adopters (15%) and even more admit they are one of the last to try something (27%), with a majority (58%) saying they prefer to try something after it has been proven useful.

When thinking about learning how to use new technology, a plurality of African Americans want to learn how to use new technology with hands on with help from a friend or family member (28%) or by themselves using an online tutorial or video (19%).

79% made a tech purchase in 2020

Top Technology Purchases among African Americans 50-plus

Greater understanding needed around digital privacy

Privacy concerns (17%), more so than cost (13%) or lack of knowledge (10%), top the list of what older Black/ African Americans say holds them back from adopting new technology. Currently, two in five (43%) incorrectly believe when a website has a privacy policy, it means the site will not share their information with other websites and companies without their permission – and another one-quarter (24%) are unsure. Fortunately, a majority (58%) do know when they see a “third party” referenced in a privacy agreement, this means their information is likely being shared with advertisers, though one-third (33%) don’t know about this.

Knowledge of African Americans 50-plus regarding internet privacy policies

■ True ■ False ■ Not sure

Advertising agencies are the typical 'third party' in online privacy policy agreements

When a website has a privacy policy, it means the site will not share my information with other websites and companies without my permission

More than one-third (36%) are not confident the things they do online when using a wireless device, such as a laptop, smartphone, or tablet, are private and will not be used or seen by others without permission. Even more (47%) do not believe the information given to or received from a home assistant (e.g. Google Home, Amazon Echo) or smart home devices (e.g., Nest, Ring) is private. These concerns may play a large role in lower adoption levels, as less than three in ten African Americans 50-plus currently have either (28% and 23%, respectively).

That is not to say African Americans 50-plus are not willing to share their personal information, but they have a price. One in five (21%) say they would give up this information in exchange for cash rewards, three times more than those who say they would share their personal information for a donation to a charity of their choice (7%), free products or services (7%), personalized products or services (5%), or special offers tailored to them (4%).

Cost concerns creeping up

While privacy concerns exist, they don't stand in the way of accessing entertainment through the internet as seven in ten (70%) African Americans 50-plus own smart TVs and a plurality (41%) view programming through both network/cable and streaming services. Fortunately, access to high-speed internet is not a problem for most (61%) but paying for this access is a different story. Older African Americans spend an average of \$71/month on high-speed home internet – a majority (58%) of whom report this being a problem – in addition to \$82/month on cable, and \$23 on streaming services. For many cost concerns may creep up as prices rise for digital entertainment.

Nevertheless, be it on their tablet (36%), computer (34%), or smartphone (33%), this population streams content daily (29%) or a few times a week (23%), most often on Netflix (69%), followed by Amazon Prime (44%), Hulu (37%), and YouTube TV (22%). Only 20 percent subscribe to Disney+.

Three in five (59%) older African Americans stream content. Most watch a mix of cable/network TV and streaming (41%), although about one in five exclusively (8%) or primarily stream content (10%).

How African American 50-plus streamers watch streaming content

■ Exclusively streaming
 ■ Primarily streaming
 ■ Mix of cable/network and streaming

NETFLIX	94%	84%	72%
hulu	68%	47%	38%
YouTube	59%	27%	17%
amazon prime video	53%	67%	49%
Disney+	41%	20%	20%
CBS ALL ACCESS	32%	14%	16%
HBOmax	24%	8%	20%

Implications

Given the cost of cable and high-speed internet services are roughly the same for African Americans 50-plus, families feeling pinched may want to explore streaming services which offer the best of both worlds. YouTubeTV, Sling and others provide low-cost access to traditional television programming and channels without the need for a cable contract. These service providers should target advertising to this and other demographics concerned by the growing cost of cable and internet access.

Seven in ten purchased a technology product, yet African Americans 50-plus are very skeptical about privacy, especially when it comes to technology. This likely serves as an important barrier to adoption. To increase comfort levels with these devices, it is important for companies to promote and advertise privacy measures.

Regardless of age, everyone could use more education around internet privacy. As scammers preying on older people grow more sophisticated, it is important for groups serving and supporting these populations to keep up with the latest ways to protect one's digital identity and offer easy-to-access and understand education on relevant trends and actions to avoid privacy violations.

With technology use already higher than last year due to COVID-19, technology companies would be smart to find ways to maintain these increased rates.

For more information on the survey and methodology please contact:

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00420.012>

2021 Tech Trends and the 50-Plus: Top 10 Biggest Trends. Washington, DC:
AARP Research, April 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00420.001>