

Technology is bridging the gap between isolation and social connection for older adults

A 2025 tech study reports on the use of technology for social connection and community among adults age 50-plus



Technology is a tool to perform a task or serve a basic purpose, but for many it can be much more than that. For older adults, in particular, it can facilitate a lifeline of social connection, helping to combat isolation and loneliness. Being socially connected has extensive benefits to one's emotional well-being, but a lack of social connection can also have a significant impact on one's physical health. More specifically, [social isolation](#) has been linked to a 50 percent increased risk of dementia and a significant rise in heart disease and stroke risks. Even more alarming is the number of older adults already in this dangerous position today. [AARP notes](#) that 1 in 3 adults ages 50 – 80 report feeling isolated from others in the past year and 37 percent report feeling a lack of companionship.



76%

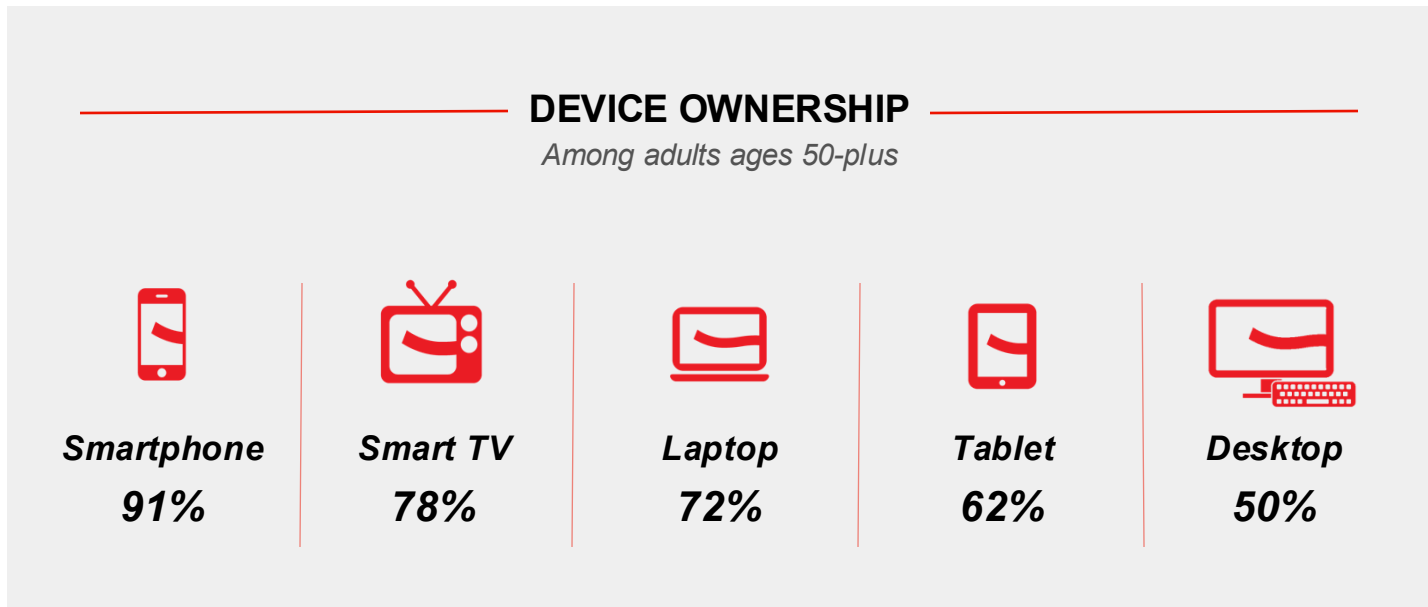
of adults age 50-plus rely on technology to stay connected and in touch with friends and family.

The good news is, older adults today have a significant opportunity to use technology to connect with the world: family, friends, people in their community, and others who share a similar passion or hobby. Many have access to the internet as well as devices and services necessary to connect to the internet and the wider world around them. And, most importantly, the majority appear to have the desire to leverage all of it to create and maintain a connected lifestyle. In fact, for some, it is not just an option but an absolute — it may be the only means by which they can stay connected to those they love.

Many older adults have access to the technology needed to create and maintain social connections.

Most older adults already have what they need to leverage technology to help them maintain a sense of social connection and community. For instance, internet usage has been [steadily increasing](#) since its mainstream arrival in 2000, and it took a significant jump during and after the COVID pandemic. More specifically, internet use among adults ages 50 – 64 increased from 88 percent in 2019 to 98 percent in 2024. However, the more impressive change is among adults age 65-plus, as their internet use increased from 73 percent in 2019 to a high of 90 percent in 2024. More and more older adults are finding their way online.

In addition, over the past several years, older adults have reported increases in ownership of the primary tech devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, laptops, smart TVs), with many ownership rates now at parity with younger adults ages 18 – 49. In fact, according to the [2025 Tech Trends study](#), 99 percent of adults age 50-plus reported owning one or more of these primary devices. The most owned and used device is the smartphone. Young and old alike constantly have their phones in their hands, meaning their ability to stay connected is literally at their fingertips.



Older adults aren't just equipped, though; they're also active. Many go online daily for everything from news to shopping and getting directions. But beyond the utility, many are using their devices to foster real connection with others.



Older adults are using tech to create or maintain social connections and combat isolation in a variety of ways. According to the [2024 Tech Trends study](#), 96 percent use text messaging, 92 percent use email, 76 percent use social media and 73 percent use video chat to communicate with friends and family. While the use of video chat accelerated during COVID when everyone was isolated, it continues to play an important role for older adults. For example, it provides older adults with a way to chat in real time with grandchildren and family members with a way to chat face-to-face with loved ones in assisted living.

**45% of Grandparents use video chat
to help maintain relationships.**

Most older adults are aware of the opportunities technology provides for social connection, with roughly 3 in 4 adults 50-plus saying they rely on technology to stay in touch with friends and family. This sentiment is consistent among people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and 80-plus.

Reliance on technology to stay connected
Percent of adults 50+ who agree or strongly agree, by age range



Digital services, social media and streaming all play a role in helping older adults maintain social connections.

Older adults today are embracing technology like never before, with 66 percent saying technology enriches their lives and makes daily tasks and aging easier. They engage in a broad range of online activities beyond communication with their friends and family.

More specifically, they use different types of digital services, such as interacting with social media platforms and streaming entertainment.

All of this tech helps older adults create and maintain a sense of social connection.



Digital Services

As might be expected, the most used digital services among the 50-plus related to social connection are internet browsing and communication tools such as email and text messaging. These digital services provide very different opportunities for older adults. While browsing provides a gateway to learn about a variety of topics that might interest them (e.g., local art shows, new coffee shops, upcoming concerts), communication tools are the most direct way to connect with others. Other types of digital services being leveraged include games, travel, personal hobbies, and of course social media and video chat. Online games have proven to be socially valuable, as they help reduce loneliness and depression, especially for those who are geographically isolated. Many older gamers can connect with others through in-game chats, texts, app messaging, or by phone.

TECH SUPPORT



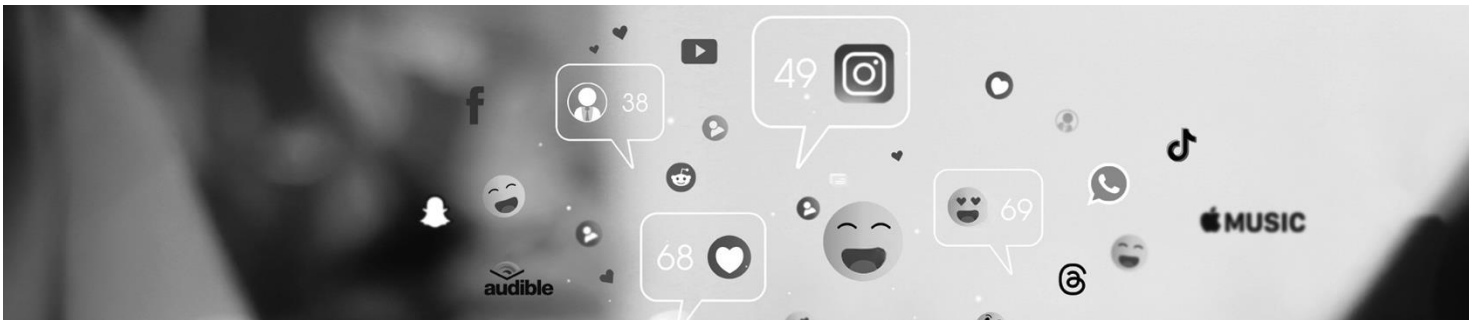
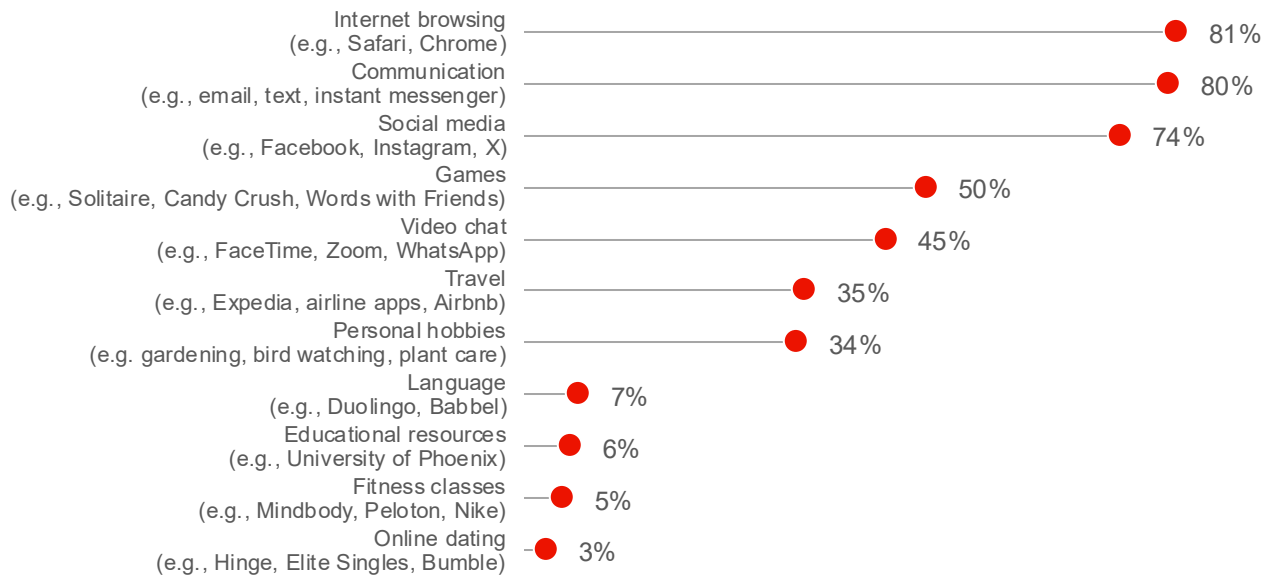
50%

of adults age 50-plus play online games, providing them with a meaningful form of entertainment and a way to connect with others.



Percent using the following digital services in the past three months

Among adults ages 50+



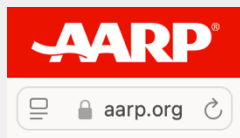
Social Media

Adults age 50-plus have proven to be avid users of social media with about 9 in 10 using one or more platforms. Facebook remains the most commonly used social media platform, followed by YouTube and Instagram. Social media isn't just entertainment, however; for many it serves as a lifeline for connection and community outside of their local world.

For example, in 2022 AARP launched The Ethel Circle, a private Facebook group that provides women with a safe space to converse about healthy aging and celebrate personal achievements. From this initial group, several additional opportunities for connection have been created – such as The Ethel Book Club, the Ethel On-The-GoSM private group, for those who love all things travel, and more than 100 private Ethel Gathering GroupsSM across 46 States and DC for women seeking to meet others in their local area. This demonstrates the power of the internet to bring similar people together, breaking down barriers that might otherwise isolate older adults, and [fostering real connections](#) that improve quality of life. A few other platforms, like Nextdoor and Reddit also allow users to form person-to-person connections as they provide platforms whereby users can connect with like-minded communities, share personal experiences and provide information to help one another.

WAYS TO CONNECT

AARP offers many ways for people to connect with the organization and with others:



Website



AARP App

AARP ON THE SOCIALS



Facebook



**X (formerly
Twitter)**



LinkedIn



Pinterest



Instagram



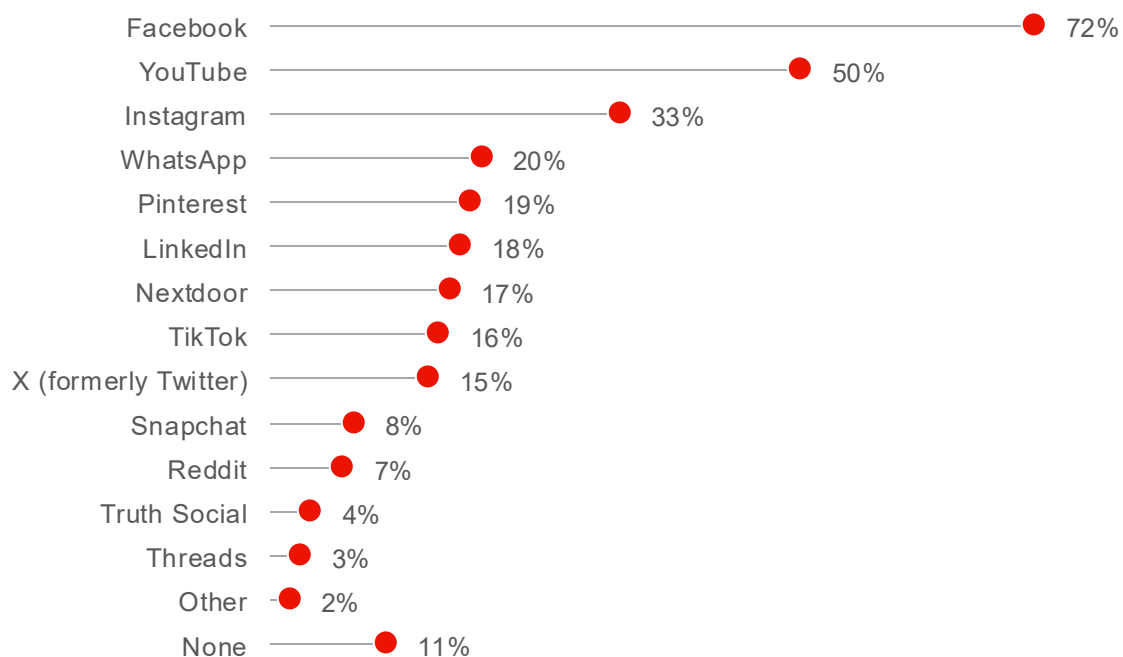
TikTok



YouTube

Percent using the following social media platforms

Among adults ages 50+



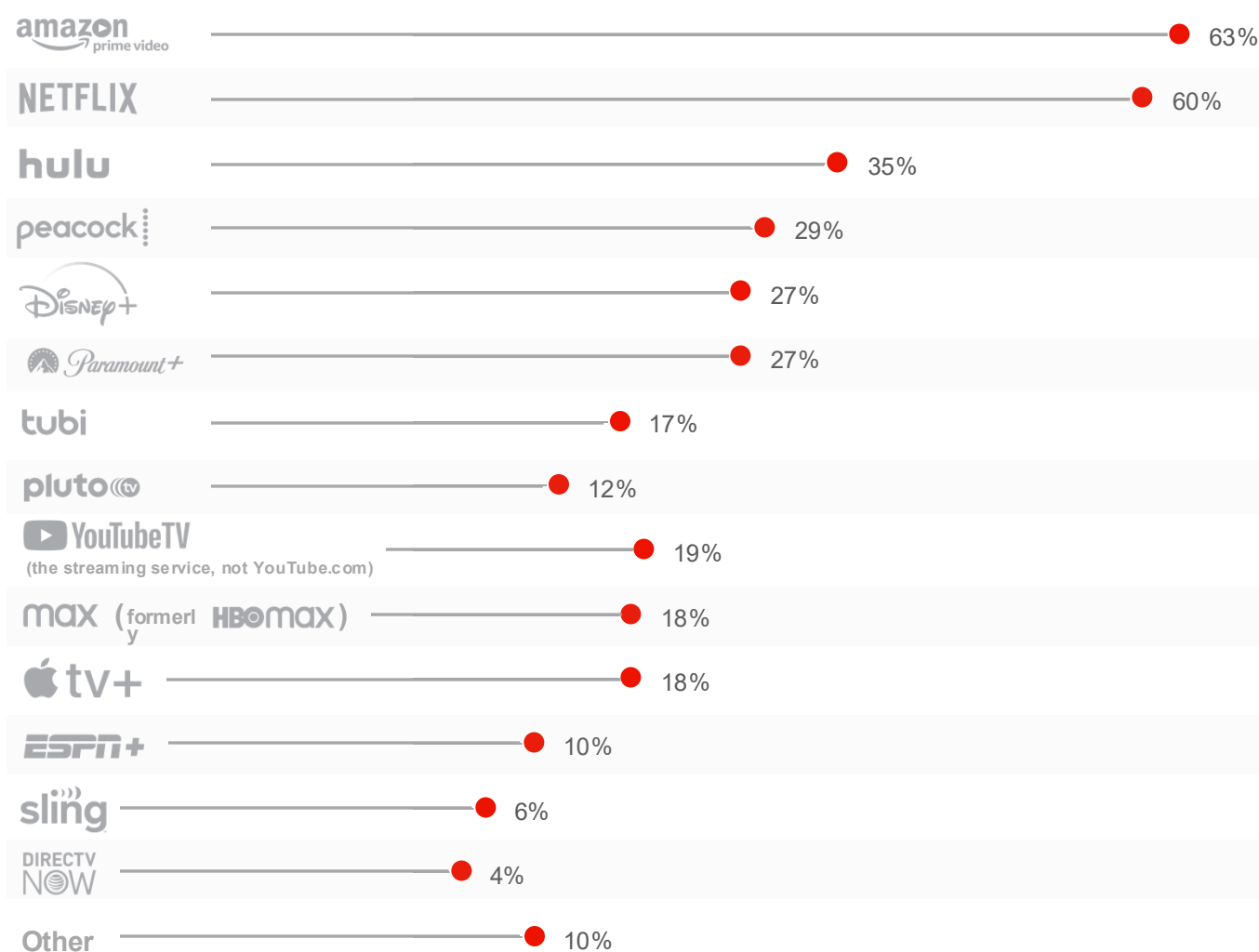
Streaming entertainment.

Most older adults, 88 percent, stream at least some of their entertainment (e.g., TV shows, movies, videos). And while many older adults see streaming mainly as a form of entertainment, like social media it also provides a connection to the broader world around them, giving them insights and access to such things as world news, current events, sports, art and entertainment. It helps older adults participate in today's most relevant conversations, whether that be about pop culture, natural disasters, or a new cancer medicine.

A variety of streaming services are available, with adults age 50-plus subscribing to an average of 3.5. Amazon Prime and Netflix are the most popular across all of the 50-plus age breaks. That said, free ad-supported streaming services like Tubi or Pluto attract 1 in 5 older adults, while 1 in 10 subscribe to niche platforms such as Britbox or PBS Passport.

Percent subscribing to the following streaming services

Among adults ages 50+ who use devices to stream entertainment



What might be most compelling about the use of streaming services is that those who use them are significantly more likely than those who don't say technology helps enrich their lives (65 percent vs. 48 percent, respectively).

Challenges remain, hindering some older adults' ability to fully leverage technology to help foster a sense of connection and community.

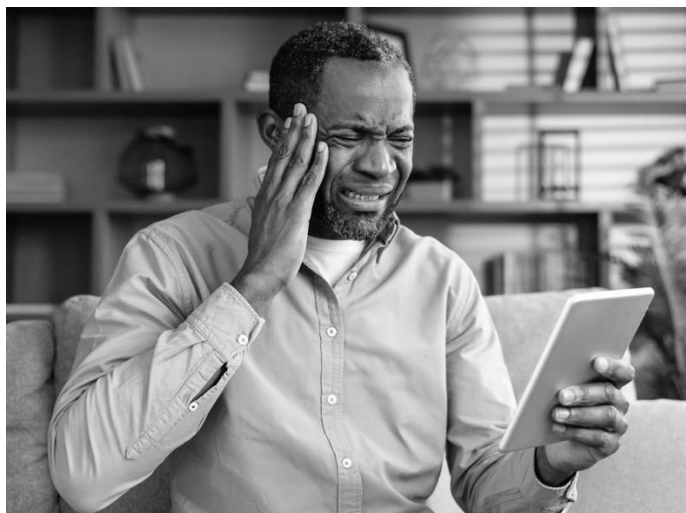
The 2025 Tech Trends study suggests that the majority of older adults are aware of and are already using technology to create, maintain and possibly improve their social connections. However, there are some who remain on the outside looking in. For a number of reasons, some older adults have not fully leveraged technology to bridge the gap between isolation and loneliness and social connection and community.



At a basic level, lack of access to high-speed internet can be a barrier to connection. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of older adults have access to high-speed internet, leaving 1 in 4 who do not. Some of the access issues could be driven by geography or by income. For example, older adults in self-defined urban and suburban areas are more likely to have high speed internet (urban: 73 percent, suburban: 77 percent) compared to those living in a rural area (64 percent). Additionally, those with low incomes are the most likely to say the cost of internet is a problem (income: below \$40k: 64 percent; \$40K–\$75k: 60 percent; \$75k+:43 percent).

Aside from access, one of the biggest roadblocks to using tech to connect is concern about trust and privacy, as 59 percent of adults 50-plus indicate they feel moderate to extreme stress and uncertainty when engaging with new tech due to potential data privacy issues.

In addition, though the past year has seen improvements, a majority of older adults still do not believe technology is designed with their age in mind. This belief stifles the curiosity and effort needed to reap the full benefits of any new technology or service.



AGE & TECHNOLOGY



59%

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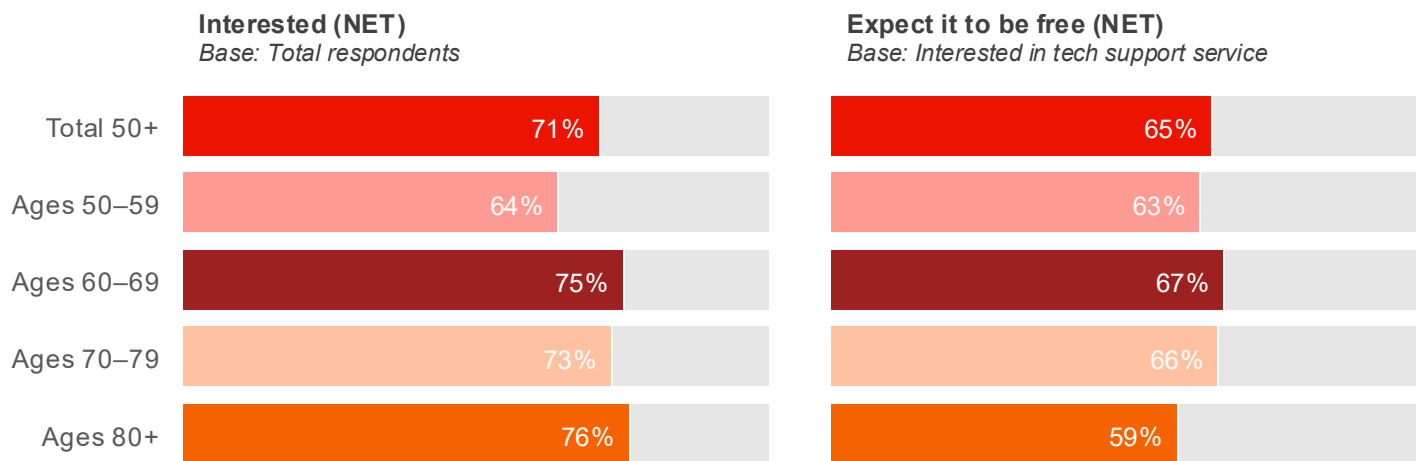


But perhaps the biggest barrier is a lack of confidence. Not everyone feels they have the digital skills necessary to take full advantage of being online. While 1 in 3 adults 50-plus feel they lack strong digital literacy skills, age and income have an impact. Confidence using tech is much more of an issue for those who are 80-plus (55 percent) or for those who earn less than \$40k a year (47 percent). This lack of confidence is most evident among late technology adopters, however, with 66 percent indicating they do not feel equipped. Therefore, it is not surprising that those who feel competent in their digital literacy are more likely to say they rely on technology to stay connected to others than are those who believe they do not have the necessary skills (85 percent vs. 62 percent, respectively).

On a positive note, the majority of older adults are open to getting assistance from a tech support service when needed, with higher levels of interest among those 60-plus compared to those 50 – 59. However, most expect this service to be free.

Reaction towards a tech support service for older adults

Among adults ages 50+, and by age range



Implications

Today's technology provides numerous opportunities for adults of all ages to connect with others — it is literally at their fingertips. This means that the gap between isolation and connection can begin to close with help from thoughtful, creative brands and services but connection opportunities should be intentional.

For brands and service providers, the takeaway is clear: Tech can be more than a tool for older adults, but success depends on designing tech that feels safe to use, accessible, and emotionally rewarding. Making design elements feel less intimidating, making the interface more intuitive for older adults, providing clear navigation paths, and even providing helpful prompts are ways brands can incorporate age-friendly design principles in their offerings.

How technology is positioned also matters. While tech is a tool or utility to get things done, it can also be a social lifeline that strengthens relationships and builds community. The human benefits of tech (e.g., connection, enjoyment) should be messaged with as much, if not more, importance than the features of a product or service. This will help older adults more quickly see the relevance of technology in their lives, reduce apprehension, and foster greater motivation to adopt and engage with it meaningfully.

Earning long-term consumer trust requires clear, respectful communication from the start. For tech products that support social connection, older adults want to feel confident that their personal information is protected. Transparency about data use, simple privacy settings, and easy access to human support can ease concerns and foster deeper engagement with tools meant to bring people together.

About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans 50-plus and their families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org/about-aarp/, www.aarp.org/español or follow @AARP, @AARPenEspañol and @AARPadvocates on social media.

This writing was created with the assistance of CoPilot and has been reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness.



For more information on the survey and methodology please contact: Brittne Kakulla, bkakulla@aarp.org; **For media inquiries:** contact media@aarp.org DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00891.009>

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