Tech and the Modern Grandparent

A new study on the modern grandparent highlights the importance of technology in the lives of grandparents and their grandchildren.

Over half of grandparents (52%) have at least one grandchild who lives 200+ miles away, and about a third (29%) live over 50 miles from their closest grandchild. To stay connected, grandparents have embraced technology, and it is influencing how they communicate with their grandchildren. Commitment to technology and interest may be high, but keeping up in this ever-evolving space is still a challenge.

Commitment to technology is strong

Mainstream technology use is high among grandparents. Most grandparents own a device that allows them to connect to the internet, including the 73% who owns a smartphone – a level that is at parity with the general U.S. market. Grandparents also own smart TVs at a rate higher than the average U.S. household.

Device Ownership among Grandparents in the U.S.

44% of grandparents are technology savvy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>All Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smart Phone1</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop Computer2</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop Computer2</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Camera2</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet2</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Connected TV2</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technology is a connector

Three out of four grandparents are on at least one type of social media platform. Six in ten (65%) are users of Facebook, outranking any other social media platform and at parity with the U.S. adult population. Grandparents have not adopted other social media platforms at the same rate as the overall population, but the gap is small for LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Pinterest. Grandparents use Facebook or some other social media at least weekly to communicate with family (35%) or friends (31%). In addition, grandparents use Skype at the same rate as the general U.S. adult population (33% vs. 38%).

Frequent phone calls to grandkids are waning in use and being replaced by rich media such as video chat and gaming systems.

Meanwhile, rich media options are becoming more mainstream. Grandparents are using video chat (24%), gaming systems (16%), and cell phone apps and games (10%) to connect to grandkids in unique and fun ways.

It’s cumbersome for some to stay abreast of new & emerging technologies

Grandparents like the idea of using technology and social media to connect to their grandchildren, but there is a gap between appeal and usage.

Two in three grandparents like the idea of video chatting with grandchildren, and 47% like the idea of texting with grandchildren. However, only a quarter are using the technology regularly to connect.

A self-assessment of their technological ability shows mixed results for grandparents: 44% say they are tech savvy, but an equal number (44%) say their technology skills are just average. Half of grandfathers report being tech savvy, giving them a slight edge over grandmothers. Still, both grandmas (39%) and grandpas (36%) say that keeping up with technology is difficult.

Opportunities

Whether grandchildren are around the corner or in another state, technology allows grandparents to stay socially connected. They can ‘see’ a dance recital in real-time, play a multiplayer electronic game, help with homework, or just hang out and watch a movie together. Technology is an enabler, and grandparents are eager to use it to share in the important moments in their grandchildren’s lives. As tech continues to evolve and grow, it will be important to find ways to help grandparents stay up-to-date and engaged.

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