Gaming – more than just entertainment

From staving off boredom to keeping their minds sharp, killing time to collaborating with others to reach a common goal, one-half of African Americans 50+ are finding video and online games to be an integral part of their day-to-day lives. These gamers love a good puzzle game and are open to trying new ones, even if they cost money. Furthermore, many are interested in leveraging gamification to set and achieve personal goals, from financial to fitness.

Half of African Americans 50+ are gamers, most play on their mobile devices at least once a week.

African Americans 50+ are split nearly equally between those who do play video games (49%) and those who do not (51%). Those who don’t play say it’s because they find them boring or uninteresting (18%), they like playing non-video games (11%) or are simply not video game type people (61%). Those who do, play once a week or more often (72%), with two in five (42%) playing every day.

A majority of gamers (58%) started getting into gaming when they were younger than 30 years old and about one-quarter (23%) never stopped playing. Two-thirds (66%) have played on and off over the years, even if there were long bouts of not playing, and one in ten (11%) only recently got back into gaming.

Games, whether video games or online games, are most often played on phones and other mobile devices (76% and 73%, respectively) followed by computers (40% and 33%, respectively) and video game consoles (15% and 8% respectively). When played on phones, African Americans 50+ are much more likely to have an Android (48%) than an iPhone (30%).
Online video gaming is popular among African Americans 50+. Many who don’t play are curious about playing.

Three in five (61%) gamers play games online and say it is more fun or interesting to play with others (36%) or they like the competition (35%). Almost three in ten say they play online to stay connected with friends/family (28%), though few play with family members (20%), compared to those who play with random people (37%).

Among those who play online games, one-half (52%) say they play more now than five years ago and nearly one-quarter (23%) of those who currently do not play online are curious or interested in it.

African Americans 50+ use games to challenge their minds and relieve stress, often when they’re at home.

A majority (62%) of African Americans 50+ who play games say it helps reduce stress and anxiety, likely because for many it is largely an absent-minded activity. The vast majority play at home (92%), often while watching TV (64%), and two in five play when they’re bored (40%) or when waiting for an appointment (37%).

Gamers most often play to have fun (81%), stay mentally sharp (69%), be challenged or solve problems (64%), reduce stress (62%), and learn something new (48%).

However, even if the gaming isn’t all-consuming, African Americans 50+ usually play games requiring critical thinking as opposed to games of luck or chance.

Types of video games played - among gamers

Gamers with children or grandchildren say these younger family members help them learn about new games or gaming technology, including which games or devices to buy.
African Americans 50+ find immense value from playing video games and are interested in using gamification to enrich their lives in meaningful ways. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of African Americans 50+ say playing games have a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing, one-third (34%) say there is no impact, and only 3% say there is a negative impact.

Beyond entertainment, some African Americans 50+ are interested in using games to improve brain health and stay mentally sharp (40%), stay physically healthy (27%), or reach a personal or financial goal (21%).

African American gamers ages 50+ are roughly split between those who try new games (46% occasionally or more often) and those who do not (54% rarely or never).

Types of video games played - among gamers

- To have fun: 46%
- To stay mentally sharp: 46%
- To be challenged/solve problems: 46%
- To reduce stress: 46%
- To relieve boredom: 46%
- To learn something new: 46%
- To spend time with family: 46%
- To stay connected and have someone to do things with: 46%
- To spend time with friends: 46%

Implications

African Americans age 50+ who participate in online gaming find it to be more fun and interesting than playing alone in addition to being a great way to stay connected with friends and family. There is growing interest on the part of gamers who currently do not play online with other people to get involved. Friends or family members could invite them to play – especially children or grandchildren – so they can be introduced to this new way of game play and staying in touch.

African Americans 50+ already find tremendous value in gaming – from staying mentally sharp to connecting with others – and many are interested in using games to help support physical, financial, and personal goals. Previous research has shown some skepticism among those 50+ with sharing personal data online, so the key to success for the gamification of goal setting will be the clear explanation of how personal data is secured and stored confidentially.

Many find playing games helps with their emotional wellbeing, yet three in five African Americans 50+ who don’t play video or online games believe they just aren’t for them. However, it is possible they just aren’t familiar with the myriad of new brain games, digital crossword puzzles, and other fun challenges or how easy it is to play from their mobile devices. Given the value and benefits which come from gaming for many, friends and family members may want to introduce those 50+ to familiar games they know will be of interest, like chess or solitaire.

Game and app developers should remember the high ownership of Androids among African Americans 50+, as nearly one-half (48%) own one and phones are the main device – coupled with a tablet – on which video games are played in order to ensure all games work seamlessly on these preferred devices.

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