

GRANDPARENTS SPOTLIGHT

Grandparents embrace video chat and other tech services and devices to connect

Grandparents increase their use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic

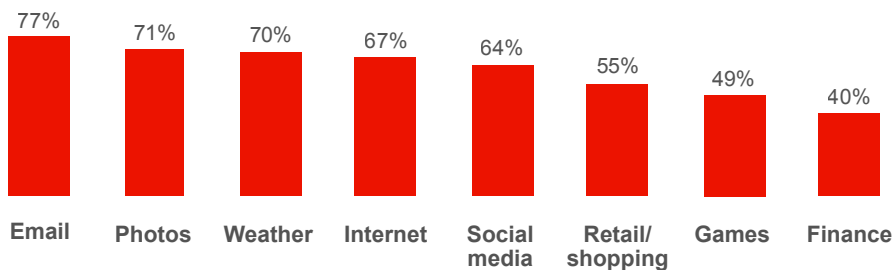


Grandparents play an important role in the lives of their grandkids.ⁱ During the COVID-19 pandemic, many were forced to stay indoors for longer than ever before away from loved ones.ⁱⁱ During this time, technology use increased, as well as spending on certain tech devices, with grandparents buying more Smart TVs, streaming more entertainment content, and learning how to video chat due to pandemic-driven separations.

Smartphones and Smart TVs are popular tech devices among Grandparents

Eighty-four percent of grandparents own a smartphone and many are using a variety of apps to manage their daily lives.

Top apps used weekly on a smartphone or tablet



A new study examines grandparents' use of technology

ⁱ David, Patty, and Brittne Nelson-Kakulla, Ph.D. 2018 Grandparents Today National Survey: General Population Report. Washington, DC: AARP Research, April 2019. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00289.001>

ⁱⁱKakulla, Brittne, Rachel Barr, Jennifer Zosh, Gabrielle Strouse, Lauren Myers, Georgene Troseth, and Elisabeth McClure. Boomers and Zoomers: Grandparents Using Video Chat to Connect With Young Grandchildren During the Pandemic. Washington, DC: AARP Research, June 2021. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00468.001>

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, significantly more grandparents than non-grandparents purchased smartphones (32% vs. 22%) and Smart TVs (24% vs. 11%) than they did in the 12-months prior,ⁱⁱⁱ spending on average \$659 more than a year prior (\$353 to \$1,112). Over half (59%) are over age 65, while 32% are ages 55-64 and 9% are ages 45-54. Additionally, half of all grandparents live with just one other person (50%), but about a quarter (23%) live alone, or with two or more people (27%).. The need for entertainment during stay-in-place orders likely explains the significant increase of Smart TV purchases which allow for streaming entertainment programming. Many also purchased new tech devices which allowed them to connect with others. On the other hand, some tech devices, like e-readers, still failed to catch on (4%, 2019 vs. 5%, 2020) even when people were forced to stay home.



69%
Seven in ten

grandparents purchased on average two tech devices in a 12-month period

ⁱⁱⁱ June 2018 – June 2019 vs September 2019 – September 2020

Top 10 Purchases - Grandparents between September 2019 - September 2020

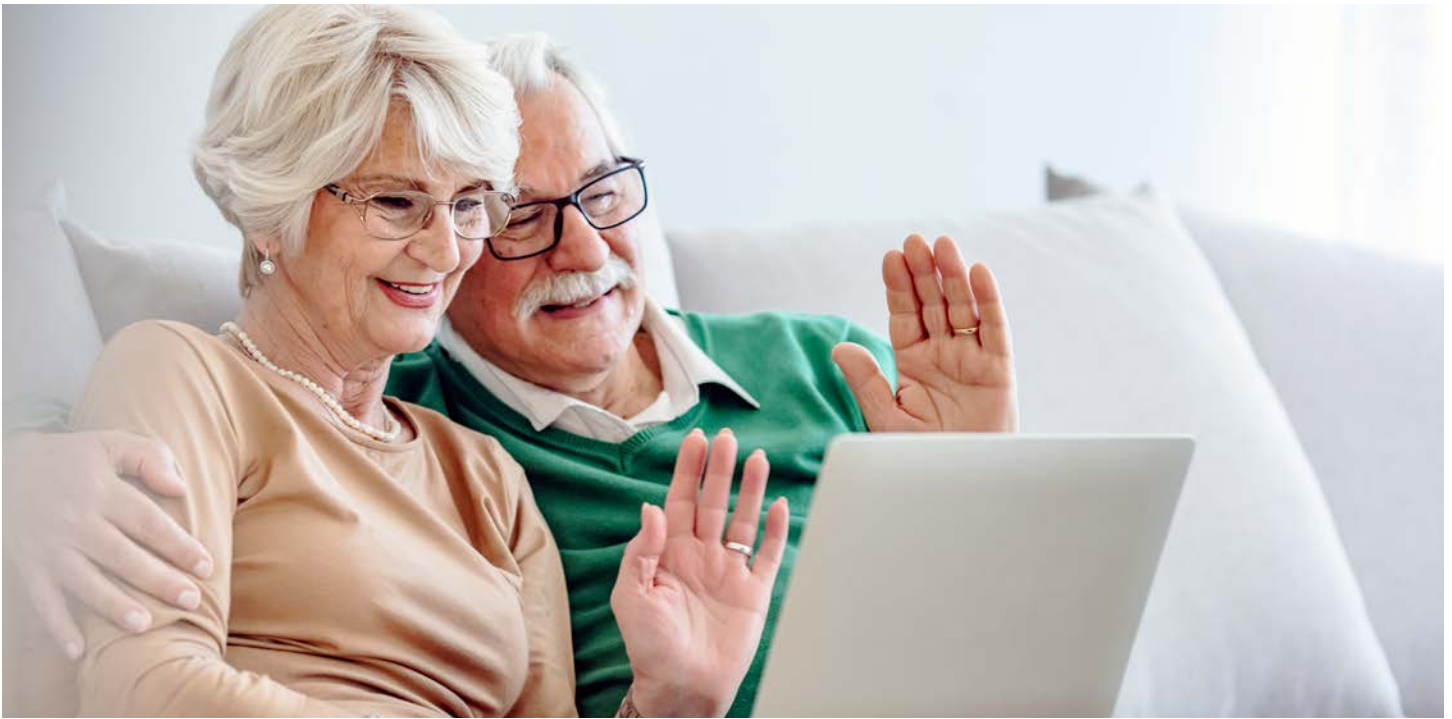




While seventy-two percent purchased any technology product, there certainly are barriers holding some grandparents back from fully embracing new technology. One-quarter or more identified cost (28%), lack of knowledge (24%), and privacy issues (22%) as their top-ranked barriers to adopting new technology.

Top ranked barriers to adopting new tech





Video chat use increases among Grandparents

Grandparents have embraced video chat and are more likely to video chat on their smartphones with friends and family (56%) than non-grandparents (48%). The skills learned by video chatting with friends and family on smartphones transfer to other activities as well, like contacting their doctor or other medical professional, making a doctor's appointment, ordering prescriptions, or receiving personal healthcare advice (43% grandparents, 36% non-grandparents).

While two in five (41%) grandparents are using video chat for medical purposes, one-quarter (24%) would like to feel more comfortable with this technology to connect with their doctors or order prescriptions via video chat.

Grandparents are video chatting more often than non-grandparents as over one-third (35%) say they use FaceTime, Zoom or WhatsApp at least once a week to connect with family and friends, compared to one-quarter (26%) of non-grandparents. More than one-quarter (28%) of grandparents say they video chat more now compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, while more than one-third (37%) say they video chat about the same.

68%
Two-thirds

plan to continue to video chat about the same amount as they do now post-pandemic





Streaming entertainment content increases significantly among grandparents

More than one-half (57%) of grandparents are streaming programming now compared to only 16% who did so a year earlier. This represents a 41-percentage point increase year-over-year. They are also streaming more often than a year before, as three in ten (29%) stream programming daily now compared to 18% who did so during the previous 12-month period. The most common streaming channels are Netflix (63%), Amazon Prime (55%), and Hulu (28%). Only one in five (20%) subscribe to Disney+, perhaps because very few have children living with them (10%). Although not as popular, grandparents subscribe to YouTube TV significantly more (18%) than those who are not grandparents (12%).

Streaming requires subscribing to services, be it home internet to stream through a Smart TV, cell phone service or WIFI to stream using a smartphone, and cable/tv to watch programming. Grandparents spend around \$263 on phone, WIFI, and streaming services monthly, with major costs being cell phone service (\$96) and cable/TV service (\$81). Grandparents also spend on average \$68 on internet services and \$18 on streaming services.



The average spend
grandparents make from
their household budget
on tech services

16%

Grandparents want to have a better grasp of technology and prefer to learn hands on through family and friends

Only one-quarter (26%) of grandparents think they are tech savvy and more than two in five (44%) feel at least somewhat more positive using technology to connect with others now than before the COVID-19 pandemic. A majority (57%) wish they had a better grasp of technology, in general, to allow them to more frequently and easily connect with others. Nearly three in five (58%) feel at least somewhat confident with technology, two in five (43%) prefer a friend or family member to show them hands on how to use technology, while only one in five (16%) would rather learn on their own using tutorials and videos.

A majority of all grandparents feel confident using the Internet (67%), computers (63%), smartphones (62%), and tablets (51%). Few feel truly confident about using video chat (27%), but many are using it anyway which speaks to the desire to stay connected to family and friends.

Only about one in five (18%) feel comfortable using a home assistant device, however, owning or using such a device significantly increases confidence. This same trend is observed with the use of tablets as confidence using tablets increased by 16+ percentage points to 67% among owners.



43%
Two in Five

grandparents agree they would use technology more in their daily lives if they knew how

64%
Two-thirds

usually try new tech after it's been around for a while

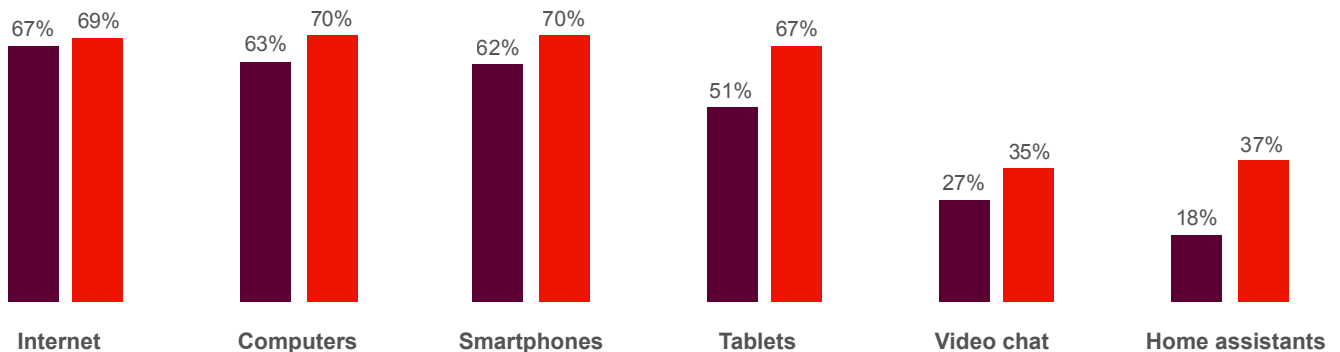


Lack of online privacy knowledge among grandparents can lead to less confidence in their online activity

Grandparents do not feel confident their online activity remains private as only three in five (57%) trust what they do online through their laptop, smartphone, or tablets is not seen or used by others without their permission. Nonetheless, privacy concerns only prevent a few grandparents from adopting new technology (22%) and doesn't stop nearly all from using social media, like Facebook (89%).

Confidence in using technology

■ All grandparents ■ Grandparents who own/use device



Even more grandparents are not confident of maintaining privacy when using a home assistant or smart home device (52%). This lack of confidence can be the result of not understanding online privacy policies. For example, less than two in five (37%) know a website's privacy policy states their information can only be shared with permission and another one-third (35%) of grandparents don't know if this is true or not, meaning almost two-thirds (63%) don't know how online privacy policies work.

Implications

During the COVID-19 pandemic, grandparents have ventured into new technologies, like video chatting, allowing them to not only stay connected with family and friends, but also perform other tasks, like reaching out to a doctor or filling up a prescription. Grandparents become more confident using a tech device during the lockdown and promoting activities which help them connect with others or allow them to perform tasks in a safe and convenient manner. This leads to adoption of other devices and services, like online banking or shopping.

Grandparents continued to spend on tech devices, significantly more than before the COVID-19 pandemic, many upgrading their TVs and smartphones, devices which allowed them to video chat and connect with others. It is important to track their spending and see if this trend continues as pandemic restrictions are lifted throughout the country.

Grandparents have substantial knowledge gaps in their understanding of privacy policies which can affect the type of activities they do online. Education around how privacy policies work and what they mean may reduce their lack of confidence and, perhaps, promote the use of tech devices like home assistants, wearables, and smart home devices.



For more information on the survey and methodology please contact:

Brittne Kakulla, bkakulla@aar.org

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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>