

Technology and African Americans 50+



New tech study shows African Americans 50+ continue to spend significantly on technology, but wish its design was more inclusive

African Americans 50-plus are increasingly more comfortable using technology and continue to spend above pre-pandemic levels on tech devices they use daily. Nonetheless, their ownership and use of technology have remained constant from 2020, and so has their desire to connect with others and learn new skills. For example, they embraced online banking and shopping at a time when these tasks were difficult or impossible to do in-person and have continued to do so even when safety restrictions due to the pandemic have been lifted, demonstrating they may have been driven to their smartphones out of necessity, but remain there likely due to convenience. However, tech developers should not be complacent as three in ten (31%) feel tech is not inclusively designed for all ages with common complaints including poor design (8%), lack of training materials (14%), and poor user experiences (10%).

Ownership and use of tech devices remain constant compared to 2020

Ownership and use of all tech devices among African Americans 50-plus, in general, have remained similar compared to 2020 when a sharp increase in ownership and use of tech devices was observed, most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for people to stay home and connect virtually. Specifically, African Americans' primary tech device continues to be the smartphone, with three-quarters (76%) owning one and almost all (96%) using it daily compared to 78% ownership and 97% use in 2020. Ownership of newer technology like wearables (25%, 2020; 27%, 2021), home assistants (28%, 2020; 29%, 2021), and smart home devices (23%, 2020; 25%, 2021) continues to hold steady among African Americans as well as its use, an indicator these devices are still being used and do not reflect a mere impulse buy during the pandemic.

92% of African Americans 50+ own a primary tech device

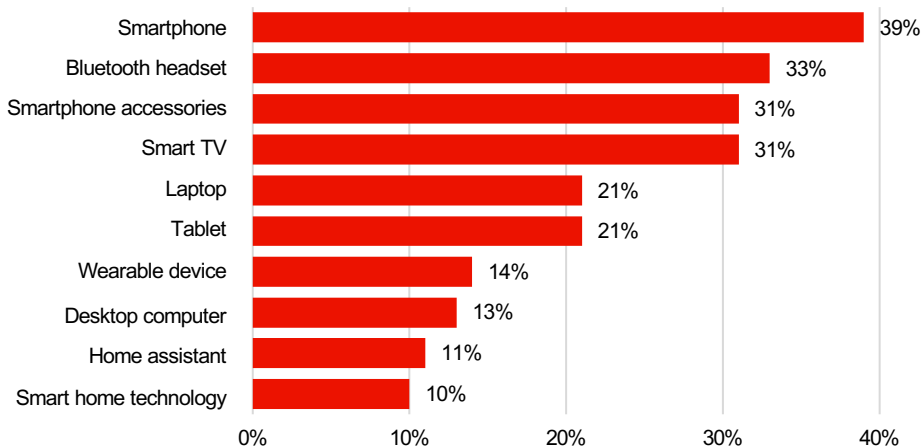


African Americans 50+ continue to spend on tech items above pre-pandemic levels, four times as much compared to 2019

In 2019, African Americans 50-plus spent on average \$367 in a 12-month year period compared to \$1,446 in 2020 and \$1,329 in 2021. Smartphones keep topping the list as the item most purchased (39%), followed by Bluetooth headsets (33%) and Smart TVs (31%).

The purchase of newer technology like wearables (8%, 2019; 13%, 2020; 14%, 2021), home assistants (8%, 2019; 10%, 2020; 11%, 2021), and smart home devices (5%, 2019; 11%, 2020; 10%, 2021), significantly lags behind trusted technology that has been around for much longer, like smartphones and Smart TVs. Yet, the opportunity for increased use of these tech devices is there, as almost one-half are motivated to use tech in their daily life to help them stay healthy (49%), something wearables can do, and two in five are motivated to help maintain their personal independence (42%), an area with which home assistants and smart home devices can help. However, among all African Americans 50 and older, not just those who use them, two in five (44%) do not feel comfortable with home assistants and three in ten (31%) are not confident the information given to or received from their home assistants or smart home devices is not seen by others without their permission.

African Americans 50+ top technology purchases from September 2020 to September 2021

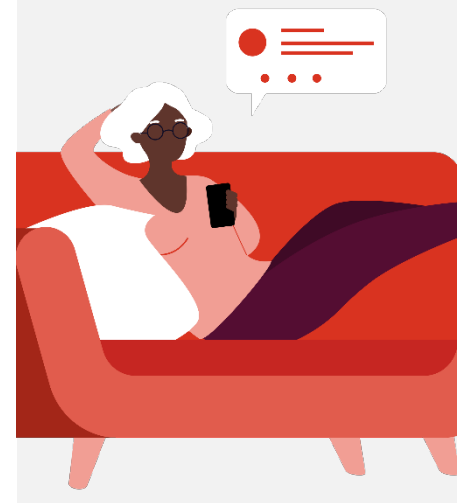
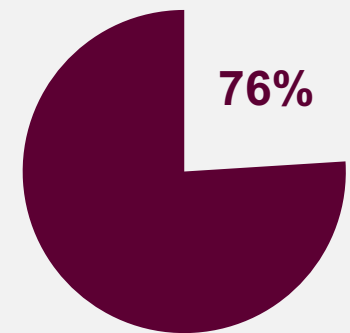


Comfort levels with established technologies are high among African Americans 50+

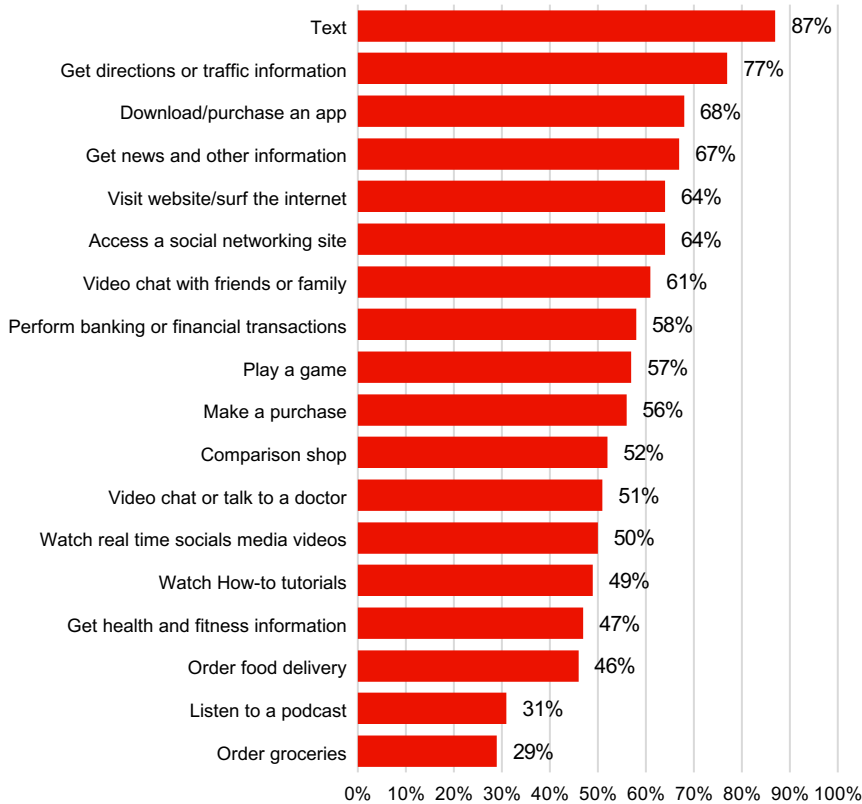
Six in ten African Americans 50-plus feel comfortable using the internet (65%), smartphones (63%), and computers (60%), and more than one-half (55%) are comfortable using tablets, but these comfort levels wane when using newer technologies, like video chat (41%) and home assistants (25%). Three in ten (31%) feel new tech is not inclusive as they believe it is not being designed for all ages in mind, thus it is not surprising for them to only adopt the technology once it has been available for a while, possibly not until a current user personally shows or tells them how it works.

From texting (87%) and getting directions or traffic information (77%) to downloading apps (68%) and getting news and information (67%), African Americans 50 and older use their smartphones in varied ways. Three in five (61%) continue to video chat with family and friends using this device, perform banking or financial transactions (58%), or play a game (57%), while three in ten (29%) use it to order groceries for pick up or delivery through their smartphones.

Three-quarters of African Americans 50+ purchased a new tech device in 2021



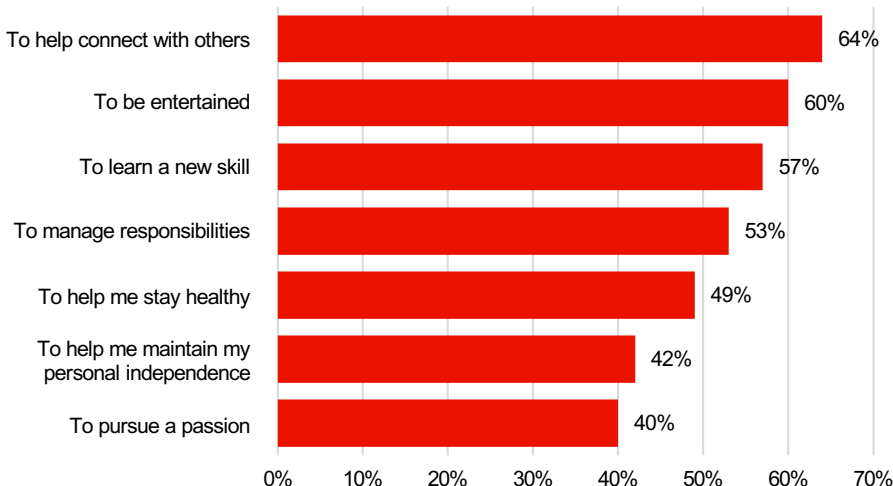
How African Americans 50+ use their smartphones



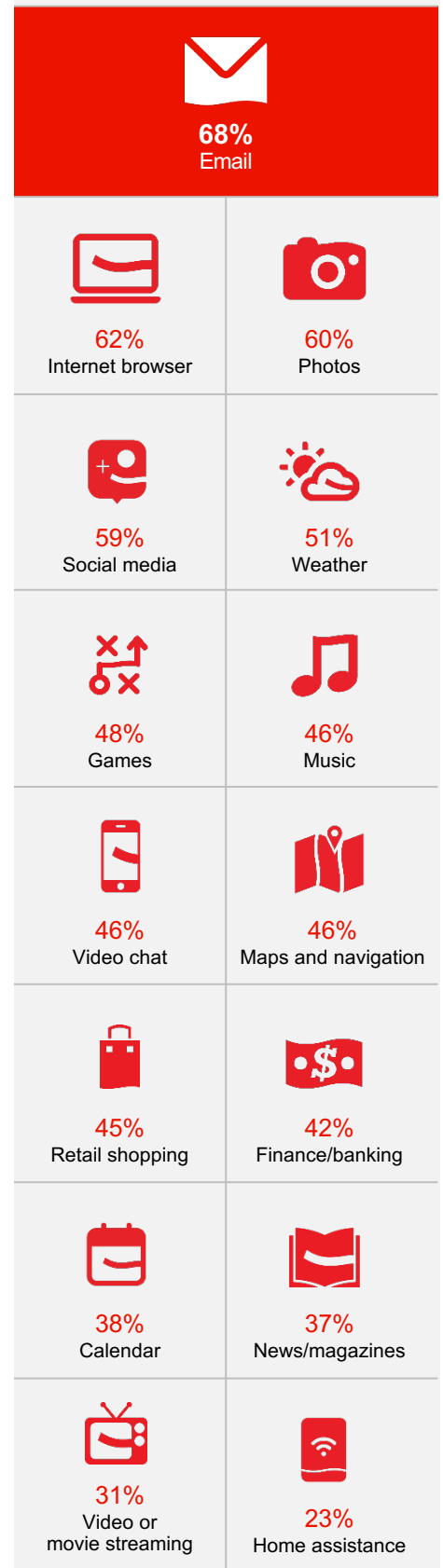
Connecting with others, entertainment, and learning are key motivators behind tech use

There are many motivations fueling African Americans' need to use technology, from connecting with others (64%) to being entertained (60%) through streaming shows or listening to podcasts, wanting to learn a new skill (57%) to pursuing a passion (40%). One-quarter (24%) are already acting on this motivation, saying they have pursued a passion or built on a skill with the support of technology; nonetheless, almost one-half (46%) say they would use technology more in their daily life if they knew how.

Motivation for wanting to use technology in their daily life



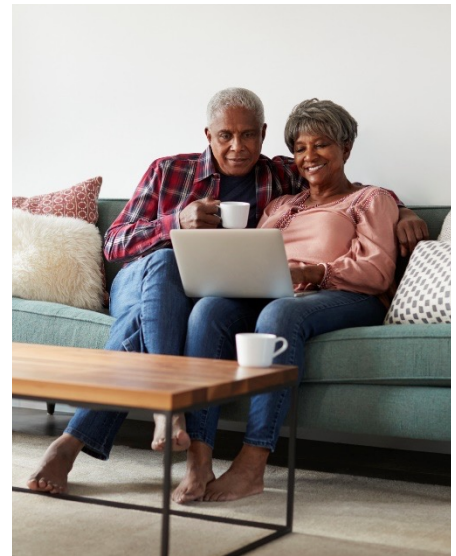
Top 15 apps used by African Americans 50+:



Despite continued concerns regarding the costs of high-speed internet, African Americans 50+ added more streaming channels in 2021

Seven in ten (71%) African Americans 50-plus own smart TVs, with three in ten (31%) having bought one in the last 12 months. Smart TVs enable people to stream programming, and more than one-half (55%) of African Americans 50-plus are doing so. About three in ten stream programming on a daily basis (28%) or a few times a week (28%). On average, they subscribe to three streaming channels, most often Netflix (63%), Amazon Prime Video (50%), and Hulu (39%). Other streaming services have gained subscribers among this cohort, including HBO Max (16%, 2020; 26%, 2021), Disney+ (20%, 2020; 25%, 2021), and Peacock (15%, 2020; 23%, 2021).

For a good streaming experience, high-speed internet is essential, and two-thirds (65%) of African Americans 50-plus now have a high-speed internet connection. However, over one-half (53%, 2021; 58%, 2020) continue to say the cost of monthly high-speed internet is a problem.



Implications

While African Americans 50-plus continue to spend on technology, especially on tech devices that enable them to stay connected with others or that provide and enhance entertainment, like smartphones, Bluetooth headsets, and smart TVs, they are also open to using technology to help keep track of their health and maintain their personal independence. This presents an opportunity for newer tech to be adopted, but perhaps a lack of understanding of what wearables, home assistants, and smart home devices can do for them is preventing more people in this cohort from embracing current and future, cutting-edge tech coming to market. Marketing that showcases how African Americans 50-plus use these tech devices to meet their needs could increase both awareness and desire to purchase.

During the pandemic, many started banking and shopping online, video chatting with family, friends, and even their doctors, and learning virtually through how-to-videos. As the world has opened up, these behaviors have continued, proving African Americans 50-plus will adapt and adopt when tech meets their needs. They are clearly motivated to use technology on a daily basis to do a myriad of tasks, and the smartphone is their device of choice. Content generators and tech developers should keep inclusivity in mind, remembering their target audience is not all tech-savvy 20-somethings and taking care to cater functionality and instructions to the 50-plus population, thus likely increasing tech adoption and use among this cohort.

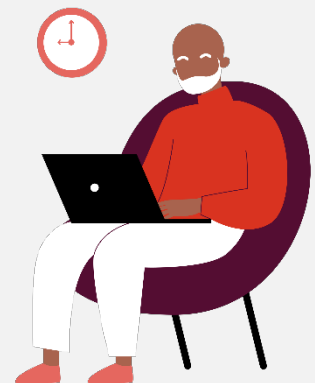
Even though seven in ten (71%) African Americans 50-plus now own a smart TV, more than two in five (41%) do not stream programming at all. It is important to understand the barriers keeping them from streaming features and channels, be it the cost of high-speed internet, the cost of streaming channels, no interest in current programming, awareness on how to do so, or something else, in order to help them get the full value out of the technology they've already purchased.

Over one-half
say they feel they are
paying for too many
streaming services.

56%

Two in five think they
need multiple services to
have enough content from
which to choose.

44%



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