

Age is Just a Number When It Comes to Technology



A new technology study highlights tech use of those in their 50s, 60s and 70+

Tech spending decreased in 2021 compared to a year prior but remains above spending levels seen before the pandemic of COVID-19, with the biggest drop seen among those in their 50s. Perhaps the sharp drop in spending among those in their 50s, combined with the relatively steady spending among those in their 60s, has closed the gap in adoption of new tech between these two groups, while the tech adoption gap moves towards those 70 or older. However, those 70-plus are frequent users of the tech they own, even though this does not translate into making them feel more comfortable with technology overall.

The steep tech adoption “drop-off cliff” is smoothing out as those in their 50s and now those in their 60s are more likely than those 70+ to embrace newer tech, like Bluetooth headsets, home assistants, and wearables

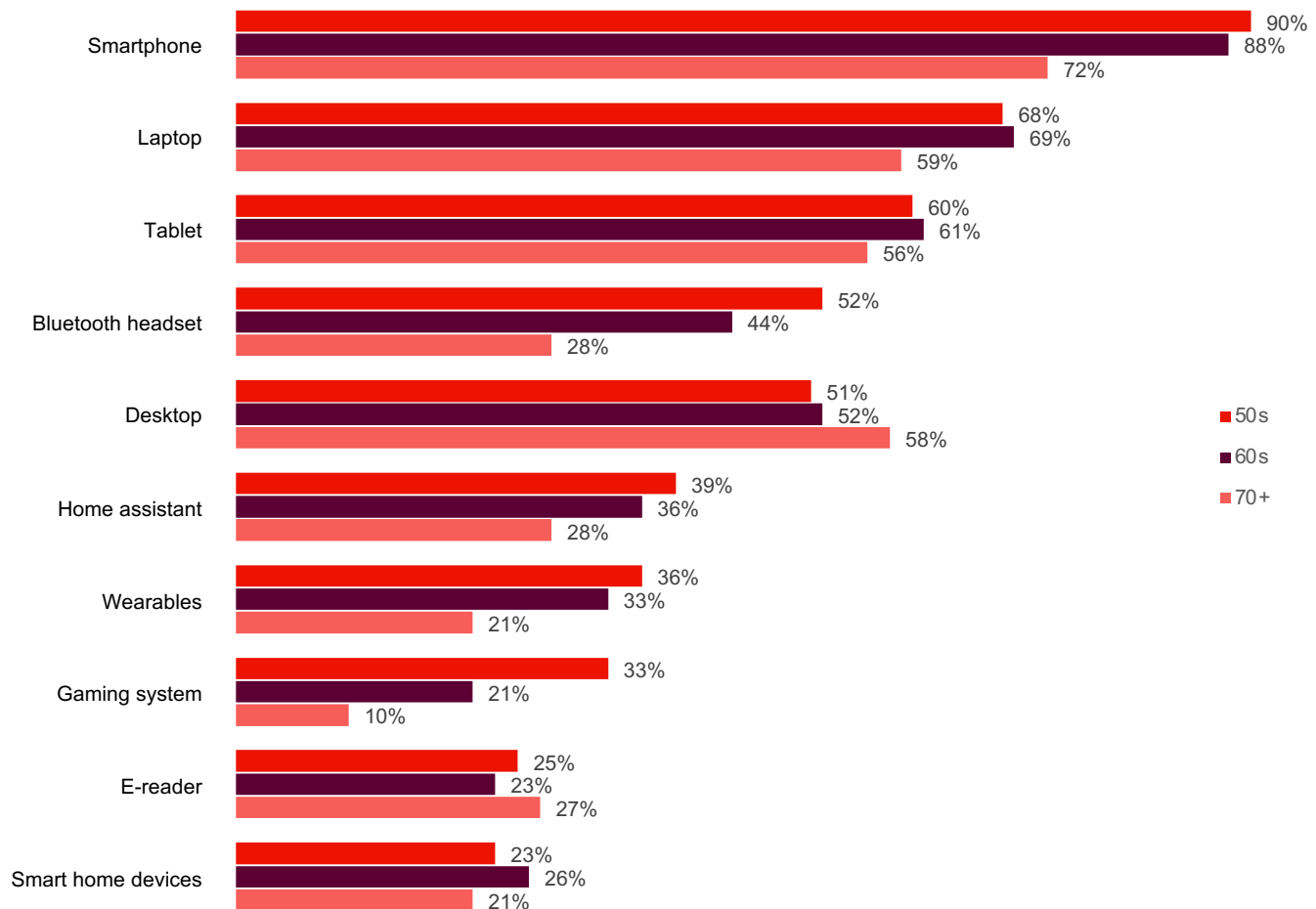
Nowadays, most people in their 50s (90%) and 60s (88%) own a smartphone, compared to those 70-plus (72%), while over one-third (35%) of people 70+ still hold on to a regular phone, compared to only one in six of those in their 50s (17%) and 60s (18%). When it comes to computers, those in their 50s (68%) and 60s (69%) are more likely than those 70-plus (59%) to own a laptop, while the opposite is true for desktops, as those 70-plus (58%) are more likely to own one than the younger age cohorts (51%, 50s and 52%, 60s, respectively). No significant difference in ownership is seen with tablets, as three in five of those in their 50s (60%) and 60s (61%) and just slightly fewer people 70-plus have one (56%). However, there are some differences among age groups when it comes to other types of devices. For example, one-half of those in their 50s (52%) owns a Bluetooth headset, compared to two in five (44%) of those in their 60s, and one in four (28%) of those 70-plus.

Two in five of those in their 50s (39%) and 60s (40%) and even more of those 70+ (45%) feel technology today is not being designed with people of all ages in mind.



Those in their 50s and 60s are also more likely than those 70-plus to own a home assistant (39%, 36%, 28%, respectively) or wearable device (36%, 33%, 21%, respectively). Gaming systems seem more popular among those in their 50s, as one-third (33%) of them own a gaming console compared to one in five (21%) of those in their 60s and one in ten (10%) of those 70-plus, perhaps because almost one in five (19%) of those in their 50s still have children at home.

Top 10 Devices Owned by Age



Frequency of use of some tech devices increases with age but not always resulting in feeling more comfortable using technology

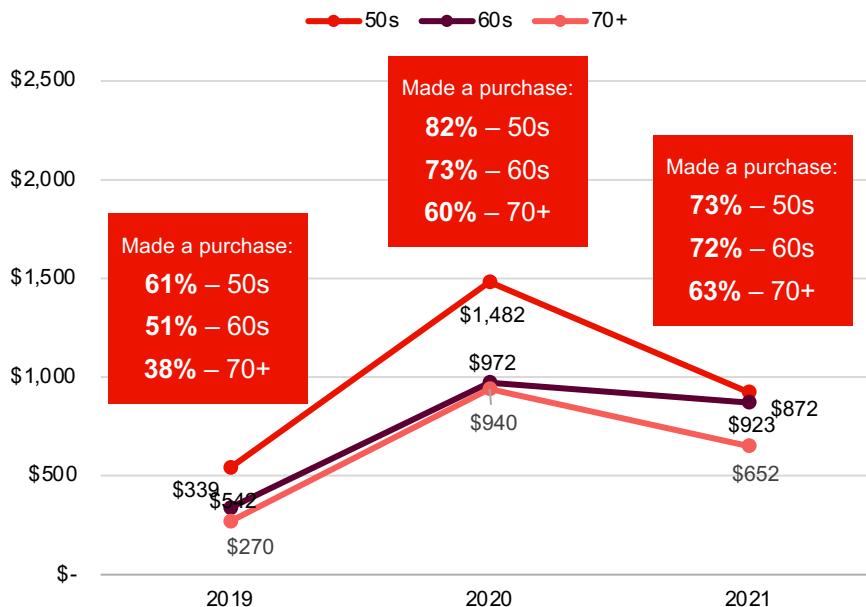
There are some differences in the frequency of use of tech devices among age groups. For example, while there are no significant differences in ownership of tablets by age, those in their 60s (58%) and those 70-plus (63%) are more likely than those in their 50s (50%) to use a tablet every day. Additionally, even though those in their 50s have the highest rate of home assistant ownership, those in their 60s and 70s are also more likely to use a home assistant every day compared to those in their 50s (52%, 50s, 71%, 60s and 62%, 70-plus). Wearables also show this trend as those 70-plus are more consistent in their use of this type of device than those in their 50s, as almost nine in ten (86%) of people 70-plus who own such a device use it daily compared to three-quarters (77%) of those in their 50s; four in five (82%) in their 60s use a wearable daily.

Interestingly, among adults 70-plus who own a tech device, frequency of use is higher than those in their 50s and 60s, even when adults in their 50s and 60s express being more comfortable using this technology. Specifically, about four in five of those in their 50s (78%) and 60s (79%), compared to more than one-half (56%) of those 70-plus say they feel comfortable using the internet, and just as many feel the same about using computers (75%, 50s; 78%, 60s; 65%, 70-plus). Smartphones show the largest difference between those 70+ and their younger peers, as three-quarters of those in their 50s (74%) and 60s (76%) and over one-half (54%) of those 70-plus say they feel comfortable using one. Adults in their 50s and 60s are also more likely than people 70-plus to feel comfortable with tablets as about three-quarters of those in their 50s (72%) or 60s (75%) and three in five (60%) of those 70-plus say they are comfortable using a such a device.

Tech spending decreased in 2021, compared to 2020, but remains significantly above pre-pandemic spend levels

In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic started, the average tech spend for those in their 50s was double (\$542) that of those 70-plus (\$270), while those in their 60s spent on average \$339 purchasing technology. Tech spending significantly increased during the pandemic, almost tripling for all age groups (\$1,482, 50s; \$940, 60s; \$972, 70-plus). While in 2019, three in five (61%) people in their 50s made a tech purchase, in 2020, four in five did (82%). For those in their 60s, one-half (51%) purchased technology in 2019, jumping to almost three-quarters (73%) in 2020. Adults 70-plus were not left behind, as about two in five (38%) made a tech purchase in 2019, compared to three in five (60%) in 2020. This upward trend did not continue in 2021 as the number of people in their 50s who made a tech purchase in 2021 decreased from 82% in 2020 to 73% in 2021, resulting in a sharp decrease in spending year-over-year (\$559 less spent in 2021). Even though slightly more people 70+ purchased technology in 2021 than the year before (63% in 2021; 60% in 2020), average spend in tech decreased considerably, from \$940 in 2020 to \$652 in 2021. The only group to stay fairly consistent is those in their 60s, as about the same number of people made a tech purchase in 2020 (73%), compared to 2021 (72%), and spending decreased only by \$100.

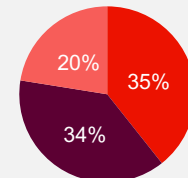
Year-over-Year Technology Spend by Age



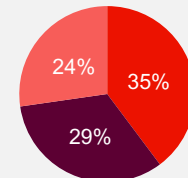
About one-half of those in their 50s (51%), 60s (48%) and those 70+ (45%) are not confident what they do online when using a wireless device, such as a laptop, smartphone, or tablet, is private and will not be used or seen by others without their permission.

The top tech devices purchased in 2021

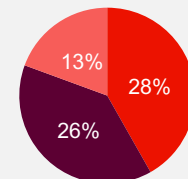
■ 50s ■ 60s ■ 70+



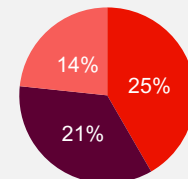
Smartphone accessories



Smartphones



Bluetooth headsets



Smart TVs

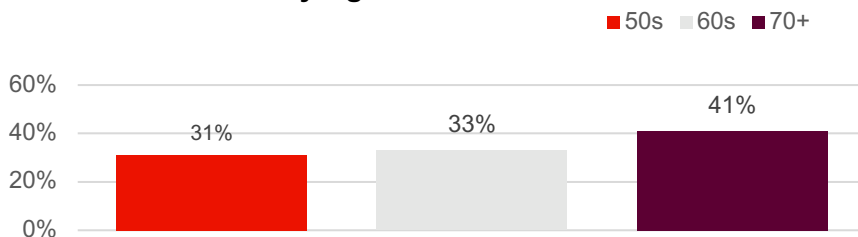
Adults 50+ would use more technology in their daily lives if they knew how to use it, nonetheless, many do use technology to pursue their interests

More than one-third of adults 50-plus say they would like to use tech to pursue a passion or interest (32%, 50s; 33%, 60s; 25%, 70-plus). Different interests motivate adults 50+ to use technology more in their daily lives. For instance, three in five of those in their 50s (62%) and 60s (63%) and over one-half (54%) of those 70-plus say they would like to use tech more for entertainment purposes, like to stream shows and listen to podcasts. Those 70-plus (35%) are more likely than those in their 50s (22%) and 60s (29%) to say they would use tech to help maintain their personal independence, but fewer of them are using tech when compared to those in their 50s and 60s.

An example of this is illustrated by their interest in some home safety tech devices which could help a person live more independently. Younger adults are more interested in this technology, although it could be more beneficial to those 70-plus. About one-third of those in their 50s (35%) and 60s (34%), compared to three in ten (30%) of those 70-plus express interest in small electronic devices that can turn off appliances when not in use, including turning lights on and off and regulating a house's temperature. Four in five of those in their 50s (44%) and 60s (43%), compared to one-third (35%) of those 70-plus, are also interested in an alarm that could tell when a door or window in their home is opened or closed when not expected. Even more adults in their 50s and 60s are interested in a device that enables them to see who is at their door (62%, 61% respectively), compared to only 44% of adults 70-plus).

However, two in five (41%) adults 70-plus say they would use technology more in their daily lives if they knew how to use it, compared to about one-third of those in their 50s (31%) and 60s (33%). Specifically, about one-quarter (23%) of those in their 50s say they would take online learning or how-to tutorials, compared to one in eight (13%) of those in their 60s and one in seven (14%) of those 70-plus. If they knew how, over one-third (35%) of older adults 70-plus say they would video chat with friends and family more than those in their 50s (15%) and 60s (14%).

Who Would Use Technology More in Their Daily Lives if They Knew How to Use it By Age



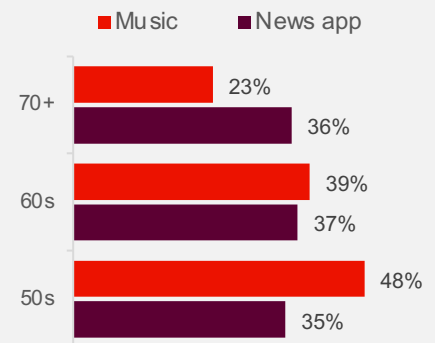
Those in their 50s and 60s, more than those 70+ use mobile apps to shop and conduct banking transactions

Other interests can be highlighted by looking at which mobile apps adults 50+ use. While the top mobile apps used by adults 50-plus are all the same, regardless of age, and are mostly used for routine tasks (see chart below), some differences between age groups are present. For example, almost three in five of those in their 50s (58%) and 60s (59%), compared to two in five of adults 70-plus (42%) use a mobile app to do retail shopping, and those in their 50s (51%) and 60s (50%), are also more likely than those 70-plus (38%) to use a banking app.



In the past year, **one-third of those in their 50s (32%) and 60s (33%) and one-quarter (25%) of those 70+** pursued an interest or built a skill which was supported using technology.

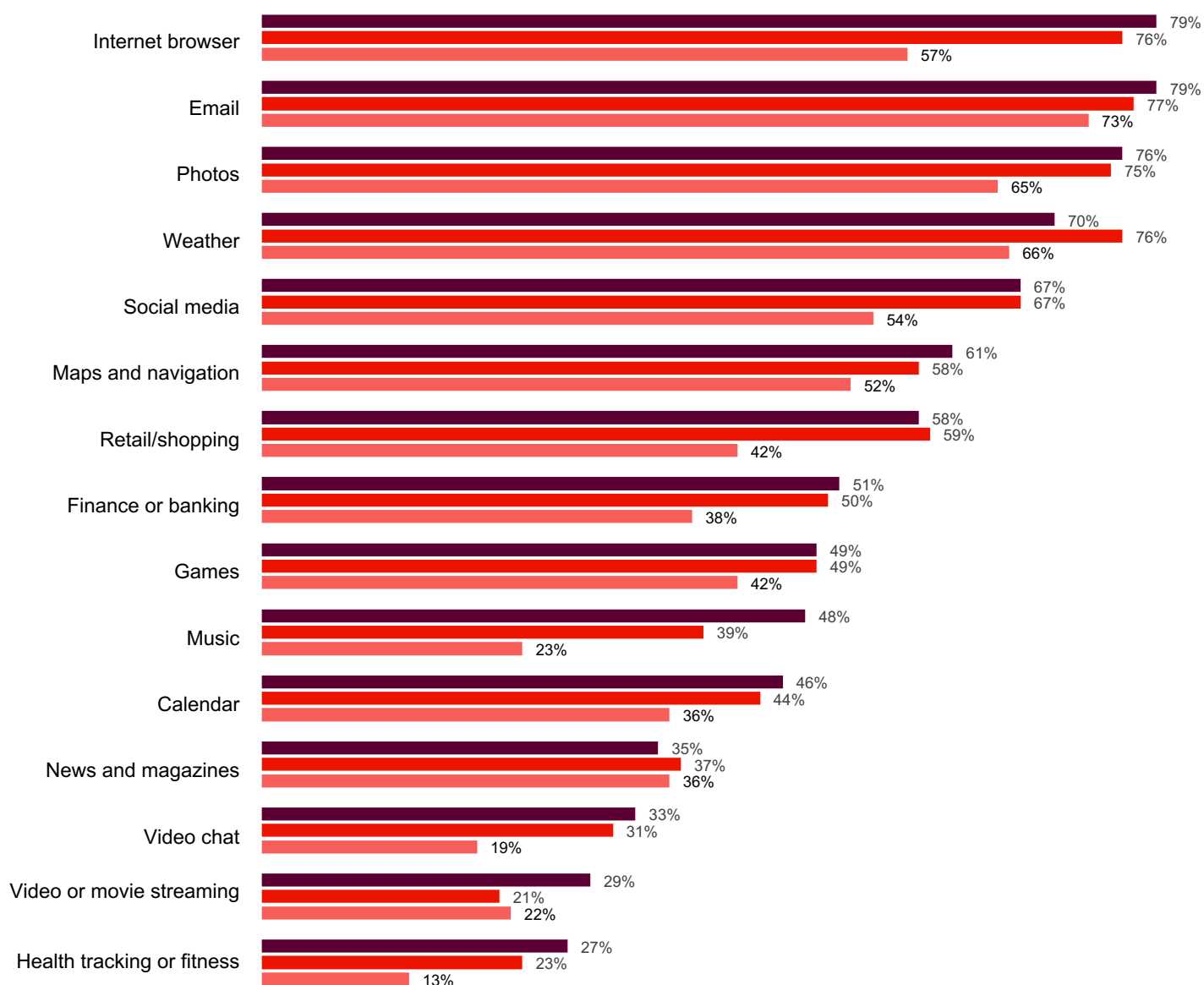
Adults in their **50s, compared to those in their 60s and those 70+,** are more likely to use a music app, while news apps are used equally by all.



About two in five of those in their **50s (24%) and 60s (21%), and one in seven (15%)** of those 70+ currently are caregiving or taking care of someone who needs assistance due to aging, a disability, or health-related issue.

Top 15 Mobile Apps Used Weekly by Age

■ 50s ■ 60s ■ 70+



People 50+ use tech to help them with their physical health, but not to manage their mental health

Even though people 50-plus say they want or already use tech to help them stay healthy, this seems to be limited to physical health, as a majority of those in their 50s (53%), 60s (55%), and those 70-plus (55%) are not interested in using tech for the betterment of their mental health, even when they are aware such technology exists.

Those in their 60s (46%) and those 70-plus (45%), more than those in their 50s (38%), agree technology enables them to lead a healthy life, with two in five using technology to help them stay healthy (42%, 47%, and 40%, respectively). Home health devices, like emergency alert systems and digital medication managers, are used at least weekly by more than one-half of those in their 50s (58%) and those 70-plus (57%) and almost four in five (79%) of those in their 60s. Some express interest in cutting edge tech which could potentially help with their health. For example, one in five (20%) of those in their 50s and one-quarter (26%) of those in their 60s are interested in a toilet that provides diagnostic testing for health conditions, such as cancer or diabetes, although just one in seven (14%) of those 70-plus are interested in this. They also have tracked their health or fitness (44%, 35% and 21%, respectively) and two in five of those in their 50s (45%) and 60s (42%), and three in ten (30%) of those 70-plus have used their smartphone to get health and fitness information. Additionally, two in five of those in their 50s (39%) and 60s (41%) and one-third (34%) of those 70-plus have used video chat to speak with their doctor or other medical professional, have made appointments, or ordered prescriptions using their smartphones.

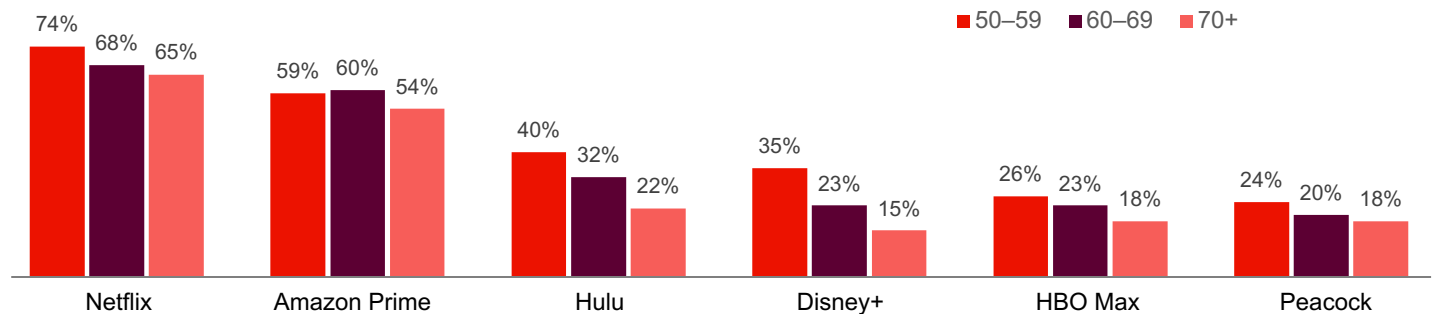
Streaming is now mainstream among those in their 50s and 60s

Streaming TV and movie programming is more likely done by people between 50 and 69 years old, compared to those 70-plus, as seven in ten (70%) of those in their 50s, three in five (63%) of those in their 60s, and just under one-half (49%) of those 70-plus stream programming. In fact, more than one-quarter (27%) of those 70-plus never streams programming, compared to only one in seven of those in their 50s (14%) and 60s (15%). When it comes to how frequently they stream, one-third (33%) of those in their 50s and about three in ten (29%) of those in their 60s stream daily, significantly more than those 70-plus as only one in five (23%) does it as often. On average, people 50-plus subscribe to three streaming channels, with Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu being the most common. Newer channels like Disney+, HBO Max, and Peacock are more common among those in their 50s and 60s, compared to those 70-plus (see chart below). About three in five (62%) of those in their 50s and over one-half of those in their 60s (55%) and those 70-plus (56%) say they feel they pay for too many services, even when a majority of those in their 50s (55%) and 60s (51%) say they need multiple services to have enough content from where to choose; two in five (41%) of those 70-plus feel the same way.



Two in five (40%) people in their 50s, one-third (33%) of those in their 60s, and about one-quarter (23%) of those 70+ have been baited to buy a new streaming service for a single show or original content.

Streaming Services by Age



Implications

Although tech spending levels dropped in 2021 for all age groups, the number of people who made a purchase in the past year decreased significantly only among those 50–59 years old. While it is unknown if this downward trend will continue in 2022 or it will shift upwards once more, it could be important to explore the reasons people in all age groups do not make tech purchases at all. Identifying why people don't spend on technology could help understand how to meet their needs better or how to help them overcome barriers and obstacles preventing them from upgrading or adopting new technologies.

Adults 50+ are using technology in different ways to help them with their physical health, but many are missing an important opportunity to take care of their mental health using technology. From meditation apps to video/audio chats with mental health professionals, there are many tech resources that can help people manage and take care of their mental health. Adults 50+ seem to be aware of tech that can help with their mental health but very few show interest. Once again, exploring the reasons why people don't find mental health tech resources interesting can help design better tools or improve education about these to spark interest resulting in increased use.

It could be valuable to understand why those 70 or older don't feel as comfortable using new tech, even when this age group uses some new tech more often than other age groups. Learning what would make them more comfortable or what they think would help them overcome their uneasiness using newer tech could shed some light on how to close the adoption gap now opening between them and those in their 60s.



For more information on the survey and methodology please contact:

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