

Communications and media in Australia

The digital lives of older Australians

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Overview

Older people (65+ years)

The internet is intertwined into every aspect of our lives – from the way we stay connected, look for information, keep entertained, shop and access services. Our engagement with technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace as the capability and capacity of online technology expands. In the past few years alone, we have seen the internet become increasingly available in our pockets via our mobile phones, streaming services exploding onto the market, and smart TVs switched on in most homes.

While younger age-groups are quick to embrace this change, for some older people whose internet journeys typically began later in life, keeping up has been more challenging.

This report examines how older people are adapting to the digital world, how and why they access the internet, and their attitudes to doing so. With a specific focus on behavioural shifts over the past 4 years, it shows that while younger age-groups are still leading the charge in the extent and types of online behaviours, there has been more significant change in the online habits of those aged 65 and older.

Older people are engaging in a notably broader range of online activities across different devices and connecting to the internet more than ever before. Mobile phones and tablets are now their main gateway to the internet and use of desktops has remained consistent.

Older people increased their online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for communication and entertainment. They were more likely to have just started or increased video conferencing and consuming video online.

Interestingly, while their behaviours have changed considerably, older people's views of the digital world remain circumspect. The majority continue to feel overwhelmed by technological change, and may be largely unmotivated to find out more. Their engagement in online environments appears to have been prompted by perceived (or actual) necessity, rather than by seeing benefits in 'going online' or feeling confident about doing so.

This research suggests that older people may be feeling somewhat 'forced' online – a situation that may have been accelerated by the pandemic, but also by the increasing digitisation of life in general. This highlights the importance of supporting older people's digital literacy and providing them with the skills to navigate what can be confusing and potentially risky environments. In this way, not only will they use the internet, but they can engage with the digital world safely and confidently.

About the research

Unless otherwise stated, this report references ACMA annual consumer surveys, collected from 2017 to 2020 by the Social Research Centre (SRC). These quantitative consumer surveys were undertaken to further understand trends in consumer take-up and use of communications and media services.

Data from Roy Morgan Research's [Single Source Survey](#) is also referenced in this report.

See the full methodology for further details about the research design, sample sizes of subgroups and additional notes.

researchacma

The ACMA is undertaking research to:

- > support time-series tracking of patterns of consumer communications and media use
- > inform regulatory development by providing an evidence base on consumer behaviour, and adoption of and attitudes towards media and communications services in Australia.

This research is part of the [ACMA research program](#).



Older people are connected to the internet more than ever before

There are notable changes in the way older people engage with the online world over the previous 4 years. While they remain likely to access the internet at home, most also used a mobile phone to go online when out and about. Their adoption of other digital devices is also on the rise. This coincides with increases in the range of activities that older people now undertake online, with the majority of those aged 65 and over banking and paying bills, viewing video content and buying goods and services.

Where do older people access the internet?

While the most common place for older people to go online was at home (80%) in 2020 (up from 71% in 2017¹), more older people are now using mobile phones to access the internet. Since 2017, there have also been increases in the number of older people with internet access at home.

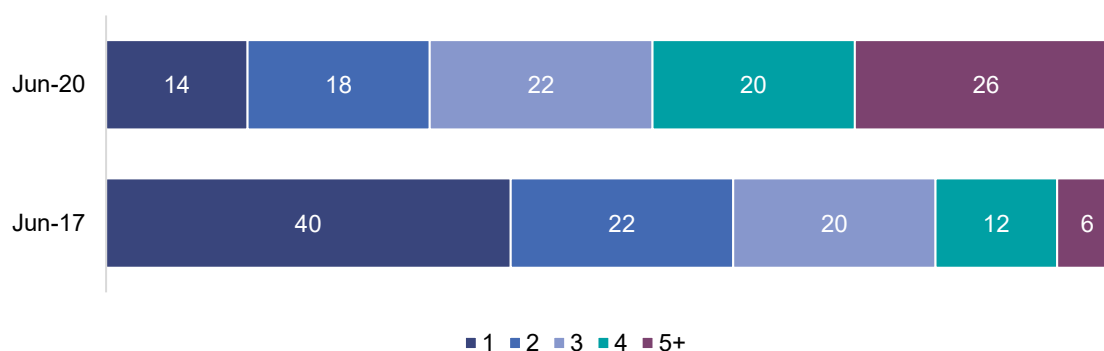


93% of older people had internet access in their home at June 2020, up from **68%** in 2017.

Which devices do they use?

Four years ago, older people used fewer apps and fewer types of devices. On average, a quarter (26%) of older people used 5 or more types of devices to go online in the 6 months to June 2020, compared to 6% in 2017.

Number of type of devices used by older people to go online² (%)



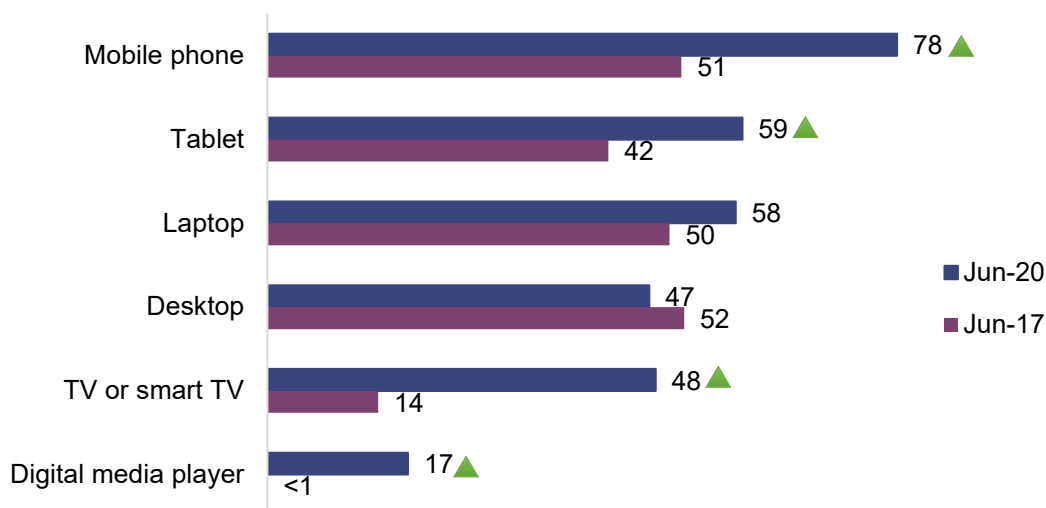
¹ Places where the internet was mainly used in the last 3 months. Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, in the 12 months to June 2017 and June 2020.

² Internet users aged 65+ in the 6 months to June 2017 and June 2020.

Devices used to access the internet in the past 6 months³

Older people are using a wide range of devices to access the internet. Over the previous 4 years, there have been notable increases in the use of mobiles, TVs and tablets.

Top devices used by older people to go online in the past 6 months:

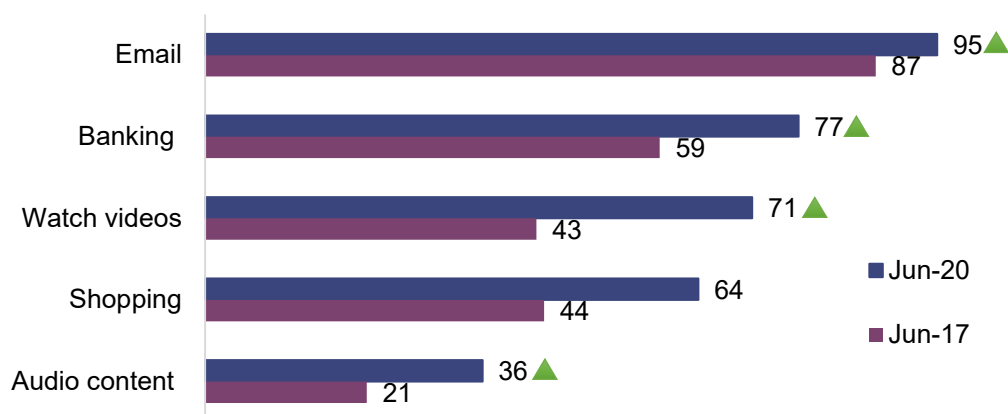


▲ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

What do older people do online?

In parallel with their uptake of digital devices, more older people are using the internet for a wider variety of activities and tasks. Almost all older people now use email, while banking, viewing video content, and buying goods and services online have increased substantially over the previous 4 years, to become relatively common behaviours for this age-group.

Activities performed online in the past 6 months⁴ (%)



▲ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

³ Internet users aged 65+ in the 6 months to June 2017 and June 2020.

⁴ Internet users aged 65+ in the 6 months to June 2017 and June 2020.



Older people have adopted social media and apps to stay connected

Compared to previous years, more older people are using social networking sites and apps to communicate. They are engaging with a greater number of apps, and their use of apps to make video calls, voice calls or send messages has increased substantially.

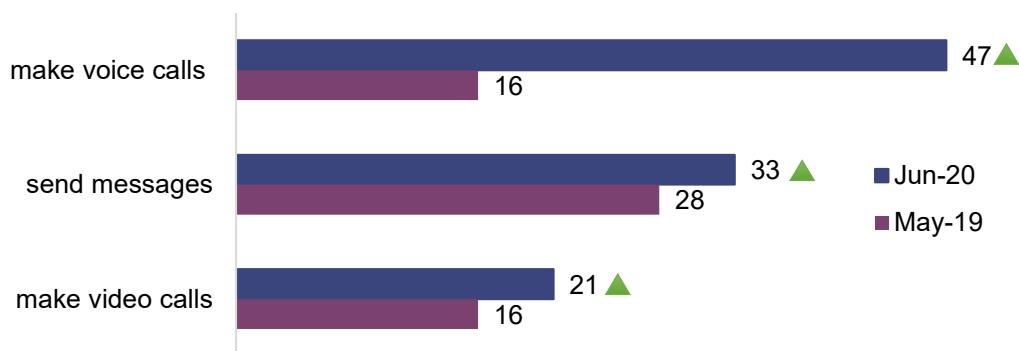
How are older people using apps?



55% of older people used an app to communicate in the previous 6 months to June 2020, compared to **33%** in 2019.

The proportion of older people who use apps⁵ to communicate, has increased in the previous 12 months. Growth in the use of apps to make voice calls in 2020 has almost tripled since 2019.

Older people used an app to ... (%)



▲ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

Top social networking sites or apps used by older people at June 2020⁶ (%):



⁵ Internet users aged 65+ in the 6 months to May 2019 and June 2020.

⁶ Those aged 65+ who used an app for social networking in the 6 months to June 2020.



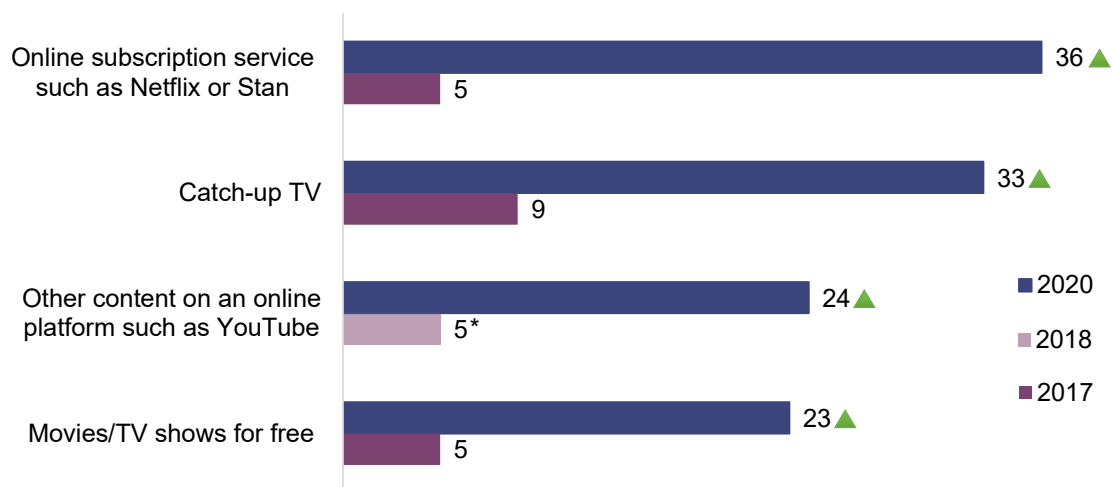
Older people are increasingly going online for entertainment

The previous 4 years has seen a marked increase in the take-up of online entertainment among older age-groups. The proportion of those using online subscription services, catch-up television, online platforms like YouTube, and free video content has risen considerably since 2017.

What are older people streaming?

- > The proportion of older people streaming content on devices has more than doubled since 2017, with 7 in 10 (70%) streaming content at June 2020, compared with 2 in 10 (23%) in 2017.
- > Their use of subscription or pay-per-view services also increased in 2020, to 61% from 36% in 2017.
- > ABC iView remained the leading catch-up TV service accessed⁷ (87%), followed by SBS On Demand (59%).

Viewing behaviour (%)



▲ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

* Data from 'Other content on an online platform such as YouTube' is from 2018 (not 2017). The question was not asked prior to 2018.

⁷ By those who watched any catch-up TV in the previous 7 days.

How much time do older people spend watching videos online?

Compared to 4 years ago, older people spend more time watching online subscription services, movies and catch-up television.

At June 2020, on average, older people watched (in the previous 7 days):

Online subscription services



for 4.4 hours

up from 0.5 hours in 2017

Movies online



for 2.2 hours

up from 0.2 hours in 2017

Catch-up TV



for 2 hours

up from 0.4 hours in 2017

What are older people listening to online?

More older people are listening to radio online (8% in 2020, up from 3% in 2017⁸)

- > While take-up of online audio services has been less pronounced overall, over a quarter (27%) of those aged 65+ years are now using music streaming services, compared with only 5% in 2017.
- > 10% of older people also listened to a podcast in the previous 7 days.

⁸ In the previous 7 days to June 2017 and June 2020.



Older people increased their online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic saw increasing reliance on the internet, particularly for communication and accessing entertainment. Older people found themselves undertaking more online activities during the pandemic, albeit at a slower pace than younger groups.

How have internet activities changed since the start of the pandemic?

While changes in online activities for older people since the COVID-19 restrictions commenced in March 2020 have not been as noticeable compared to the rest of the population, more of them first started a range of online activities that included video conferencing, telehealth, professional consultations and watching video content.

Since the pandemic restrictions began, older people first started or increased their use in the following activities⁹:



34% started video conferencing/calling
and **41%** increased their use.



50% started using telehealth
and **29%** increased their use.



15% started using legal, financial or other professional consultations online
and **15%** increased their use.



4% started watching video content
and **27%** increased their use.

⁹ Internet users aged 65+ in the 6 months to June 2020.







Older people remain wary of the digital world

Although the online habits of older people have shifted significantly in the past few years, their attitudes towards technology have not changed substantially. The majority continue to feel overwhelmed by change in the digital environment, suggesting that increases in the use of technology among this group are potentially the result of the changing, more digitised environment that emerged during the COVID-19 period. In a sense, older people are engaging with technology out of necessity, rather than choice.

How do older people feel about technology?

While older people are increasingly recognising the benefits of the internet, most remain uncertain about technological change, and find it difficult to keep up. Despite notable changes in online behaviour – with older people using more apps for communication and doing a broader range of internet activities – there has been no marked shift in older people wanting to learn more about technology. They:

	2020	2017
 find technology is changing so fast, it's difficult to keep up with it	80% ▼	84%
 feel that computers and technology give them more control over their lives	34% ▲	26%
 would go out of their way to learn everything they can about technology	28%	26%
 are worried about the invasion of their privacy through new technology	67%	65%

▲▼ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, in the 12 months to June 2017 and June 2020.